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HISTORY OF S. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.





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✓  
Francesco d'Assisi. Saint

HISTORY  
OF  
S. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

BY THE  
ABBÉ LÉON LE MONNIER

TRANSLATED BY  
A FRANCISCAN TERTIARY

*WITH PREFACE BY H. E. CARDINAL VAUGHAN,  
ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER*

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## P R E F A C E.

THE beauty and power of the Catholic Church are never seen to better advantage than in the lives and works of her saints. Chosen temples of the Holy Spirit, the saints are at once the objects and agents of the chief operations of His grace. "*God is wonderful in His saints*" (Ps. lxxvii. 36). In the life of a saint we find the Gospel of Christ written not upon paper, but upon a living soul, and it cannot but be profitable that we should study it devoutly, in order that we may lay to heart the practical lessons of courage and holiness which it puts before us, in the following of Him who is "*the Light of life.*" This translation of the life of S. Francis by the Abbé le Monnier will do much, it may be hoped, to make English readers still more familiar with the character and spirit of the great saint, whose name, after the lapse of more than six centuries, is still a household word in the world-wide family of the Catholic Church. To Englishmen, in fact, the personality of S. Francis can hardly fail to be an object of special interest. For, although the saint never set foot upon our shores, the impact of his work was felt in England more than in most other countries. In his order, he has left his mark upon our national past, and has exercised upon our national life an influence at once so powerful and beneficent that the "*Coming of the Friars*" is and must forever remain one of the happiest landmarks in English history.

The work of the Friars in this country was pre-eminently

that of a religious, social, and educational revival. Making themselves poor for the love of the poor, the sons of S. Francis brought home to the hearts of the toiling masses the saving and sympathetic message of the Church, and spent their lives in labouring to better and brighten with the truest of all consolations the lot of the English workman. That is surely a work which strikes a note of deep harmony with the best aims and ideals of earnest-minded men in our own day.

The great Bishop Grosseteste, himself an eye-witness of the work of the Friars, thus describes their unexampled success in his letter to the reigning Pontiff, Gregory IX.: "Your Holiness may be assured that in England inestimable benefits have been produced by the Friars, for they illuminate our whole country with their preaching and their learning. Their holy conversation excites vehemently to contempt of the world and to voluntary poverty, to the practice of humility, to obedience to prelates and to the head of the Church, to patience in tribulation, abstinence in plenty,—in a word, to the practice of all virtue. O, if your Holiness could see with what devotion and humility people run to hear the word of life from them, for confession, and instruction as to daily life, and how much improvement the clergy and regulars have obtained by imitating them, you would indeed say that '*they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined*'" (Epistol. lviii.).

One result of the clear insight which guided the Franciscan movement was the perception that devotion, if it is to be something more than a mere emotional and ephemeral religiosity, must be founded on a sound basis of doctrine—for man's life is swayed by his knowledge, the springs of action are to be found in belief, and conduct ultimately rests upon conviction—and that no movement of social



reform can have promise of an enduring hold upon the future unless it makes its appeal to the intelligence, and is educational in its influence, not only upon the masses of the people but upon the leading classes, and on those in whom the people find their teachers and their rulers. It is a striking fulfilment of this law that we find the same Friars who nursed the lepers, who preached from the village-crosses, who cheered the labourers in the harvest-field, or the traveller by the wayside, who helped the sick, the sorrowful, and the sinful in the slums of our medieval cities, who amused and instructed the multitudes by their miracle-plays, are the same brotherhood who filled with distinction the professorial chairs at Oxford, and so took the lead in the very van of theological learning as to make our English Universities the envy of Europe. By thus laying hold of the chief seat of English education, they wisely won for themselves a permanent influence in moulding the spirit and thought of the English clergy, and the future occupants of the English bishoprics. The great names of Duns Scotus, Adam de Marisco, Peccham and Bacon, tell us how splendidly both here and abroad the Friars fulfilled this high educational trust which was accorded them in the work and life of the medieval Universities. Pope Leo XIII. has commended to the Church in our own times S. Thomas Aquinas as "the Prince of Theologians." S. Thomas had for his master Alexander Hales, an Englishman and a Franciscan, and in a letter to one of the Friars, the angelic doctor gratefully acknowledges that "the best method of study" consists in solely following the lessons of this great English teacher.

This double aspect of the apostolate of the Friars as popular preachers and as great theological teachers is not inaptly described in the words of a non-Catholic author in our own day, when he says that the Franciscans "lived on

charity, doing for the lowest the most menial offices, speaking to the poorest words of hope, preaching to the learned and simple such sermons—short, homely, fervent, emotional—as the world had not heard for many a day. How could such evangelists fail to win their way! Before Henry III.'s reign was half over, the predominance of the Franciscans over Oxford was almost supreme." He adds "very soon the English Franciscans became the most learned body in Europe, and that character they never lost till the suppression of the monasteries swept them out of the land." \*

Nothing could be more mistaken than the conjecture of certain writers, who, apparently anxious to read the Franciscan movement in the light of their own predilections, have sought to give to the work of the Friars a colour of "undenominationalism," and to represent the drift of their preaching as not only rather moral than dogmatic, but as one in which the value of dogma and orthodoxy was discounted to make room for a fuller presentment of the precepts of morality. On the contrary, we find that it was precisely at the hands of the Friars that dogmatic Theology received its most brilliant exposition and its most systematic development. We have only to look at the literature of the time to be convinced that the Friar was quite as much a dogmatic professor as a popular preacher, and that the sermons of the preacher, however homely, never escaped from the theological ground-work and delimitations laid down by the lectures of the professor. And as to orthodoxy, the position of the Friars was luminously conspicuous even in an age when men shrunk from the taint of heresy as from a thing of shame. S. Francis, as we might expect, had placed loyal adherence to the Catholic faith and

\* "Coming of the Friars," by Dr A. Jessop, pp. 44-45.

obedience to the Pope in the forefront of his observance, and had made both to be the very Alpha and Omega of his rule. Thus, before asking obedience of his brethren, he begins by himself giving the example of it. "Brother Francis promises obedience and respect to the lord Pope and to his successors canonically elected, and to the Roman Church, and let the other brothers be bound to obey brother Francis and his successors." He requires that all who seek to enter his brotherhood shall be "diligently examined as to the Catholic Faith and to the Sacraments of the Church," and only admitted if "they will faithfully confess and observe the same." In like manner, S. Francis concludes his rule in characteristic terms by providing that "a Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church shall be governor and protector, and corrector of this fraternity, so that, always submissive and abased at the feet of this same Church, we may observe poverty and humility, and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised" (Rule, pp. 330-336). As Mr Brewer very rightly observes in his preface to the *Monumenta Franciscana*, the Franciscans "were especially enjoined by their founder to uphold the dignity and authority of the Roman See" (p. xli.).

It is not a little significant that one of the most powerful and most popular movements which affected the life of the English Church in the Middle Ages was also one of the most papal, and carried out by agents who were specially noted for their unstinted devotion to the Holy See. This impress of loyal submission to the See of Peter rests with remarkable clearness upon the friends and followers of the Order in England. Volumes have been filled with the messages of sympathy, devotion, and loyalty which the Church in all parts of the world during our own times has addressed to Pius IX. and to Leo XIII. And yet, where amongst them shall



we find any expression of love and obedience more eloquent and fervid than that which we read in the congratulatory treatise which the great English Franciscan Adam de Marisco composed for the English Primate to be addressed to Innocent IV., the Roman Pontiff of his day? Grosse-teste, the illustrious bishop of Lincoln, the teacher, patron, and protector of the Friars, was the strenuous upholder of Papal Supremacy. He taught the doctrine, as we know, of Papal jurisdiction with a firmness and clearness which has not been surpassed in any of the Catholic schools of theology of our own time. Our great and patriotic Archbishop, John Peccham, who played the leading part in the unification of Wales and England in the thirteenth century, was himself a Franciscan Friar. How true he remained to the injunction of his saintly founder and to the spirit of his order may be gathered from the words in which he assures the Pope that "we are ready at all times to lay our neck under the decisions of the Holy Apostolic See." \*

In these days, when the minds of men are happily kindled with zeal for the betterment of the masses and for the advancement of learning, it cannot but be of interest to recall the great work which in both these fields was achieved by the Order of S. Francis in this land, and which has made the "Coming of the Friars" a memorable epoch in the annals of our nation. In that work, we readily recognise all those features in which we in our own day are wont to trace the augury of thoroughness and success. It was social. It was popular. It was educational. It was religious, founded in the charity and humility of Christ. It was Catholic. And, as all things truly Catholic must be, it was conceived and carried out in the spirit of devoted obedience to the Holy See. The more we appreciate the

\* "Registrum Epistolarum," J. Peccham (Roll Series), Vol. II., p. 512.

Franciscan movement, and the historic service which it rendered to our country, the more we shall turn with grateful and loving interest to study it in its source, and read its true character in the winning personality of the great saint who, under God, was its centre, its author, and its prime-mover. In that study, which so well becomes the Catholics of England, we doubt not that this volume will prove a help and a guide. We pray that its pages may leave deeply imprinted upon the hearts of all its readers the spirit of S. Francis, the spirit which his followers brought to our shores in the thirteenth century and which his faithful sons and tertiaries still preserve in our midst,—the spirit which teaches Christian hearts to love and to imitate in the midst of a wealth and pleasure-seeking age, Him who, “*being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty you might become rich.*”

HERBERT, CARDINAL VAUGHAN,  
*Archbishop of Westminster.*



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## THE AUTHOR'S LETTER TO HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIII.

MOST HOLY FATHER,

The poor man of Assisi has at all times been dear to the Papacy. "He shone in the temple of God, as the morning star in the midst of a cloud," said Gregory IX., at his canonisation. His influence, ever present in the Church, and ever beneficial, has been celebrated no less splendidly by the Popes who succeeded that venerable Pontiff.

Your Holiness, by a sort of predestination, has from earliest years had this devotion of your predecessors. "From our youth, filled with admiration for S. Francis, We have been accustomed to honour him with peculiar veneration." This you have confided to us, in one of those effusions which shed such a charm upon your apostolic letters.

Having been called, for our welfare and consolation, to the government of our souls, you have continued faithful to the sentiments of your youth. S. Francis has appeared to you as one of the sweetest and strongest supporters of your Pontificate. You have turned to him, and as a father sure of his children's hearts, you have turned us to him. You desired all, pastors and flocks, to salute "this firm support and column of Christianity."

Holy Father, the History of S. Francis which I am publishing has sprung from this inspiration. It is consecrated to telling once more, what a beautiful creation of God this beloved Saint was, what a salutary mission he accomplished in the Church and in the civil society of his age. The homage of it entirely belongs to you. In humbly placing it at your feet, I seem to be bringing you something that is yours.



My greatest recompense would be if it were accepted and blessed by your Holiness. I am the least of your sons. It is not for me to speak adequately, of the tranquil courage and the serene wisdom with which you pass through these stormy times ; but I am both fulfilling a duty and contenting my heart in expressing and offering to you the tenderest veneration for your Person and your authority.

I am, Holy Father,

Your Holiness' most humble and obedient Servant,

LÉON LE MONNIER,

*Curé of S. Ferdinand.*

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#### LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIII.

TO OUR DEAR SON LÉON LE MONNIER,  
PRIEST, CURÉ AT PARIS.

LEO XIII. POPE.

DEAR SON, salutation and apostolic benediction. We are not astonished that you, in your turn, have wished to write the history of the Blessed Francis of Assisi, though so many have already undertaken to relate that history and to transmit it to posterity. For, on the one hand, the life of this most holy man is so rich in events, so full of virtues, that it offers well-nigh inexhaustible material ; on the other hand, documents unknown to the ancients have been brought to light in the course of years. But We would specially congratulate you on having given a proof of your talent and piety in a very elegant and noble work. And We grant you this testimony the more willingly, since, on account of our singular devotion to Francis, the father and the legislator, We always consider anything that tends to sustain and heighten his glory, as a happy event.

Receive, dear son, in pledge of the celestial favours, the apostolic benediction that We grant you very affectionately.

Given at Rome, near St Peter's, the 19th March, in the year 1890, the thirteenth of our Pontificate.

LEO XIII., POPE.

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LETTER OF THE REV. FR. BERNARDINO OF  
PORTOGRUARO,

MINISTER GENERAL OF THE FRANCISCANS.

ROME, *August 15, 1889.*

HAVING till now been unable myself to read your History of S. Francis, I have deputed one of our Definitors, the Rev. Fr. Marcellino of Civezza, whom you know, and whose historical works you esteem, to do so. His judgment is the most complete praise that could possibly be given to your beautiful work; I will lose no time in imparting it to you. He writes as follows:

"According to your desire, I have read the new History of S. Francis by the Abbé le Monnier, of the Parisian clergy. I purposely say, the 'new' history, for the work merits this qualification, the author having gone back to the original sources, and studied them in a way that no one has previously done.

"More than this, he has put the life of S. Francis and the admirable foundations of this marvellous man in their true light. The designs of God in regard to him, the inspiration from above which guided his whole life, and the fidelity with which he corresponded to this inspiration, the various phases of the great and universal renewal of the Church, which was one of the most considerable events of the Middle Ages, this is the incomparable picture which the Abbé le Monnier presents to us with all the exactness of history, in his beautiful work.

“ This history is a monument, *aere perennius*, raised to the glory of S. Francis. It will go down to posterity with the studies of Chavin de Malan and Frédéric Ozanam, who have thrown so much light and charm on the poetical side of the patriarch of Assisi and his Order.”

I give you my wishes, M. le Curé, for the diffusion of your work. It will suffice that it be known, to ensure its appreciation and the multiplication of its editions.

Thanking you for the service you have rendered to the Church and to the Order, I beg you to accept my warmest sentiments in our Lord.

BR. BERNARDINO DI PORTOGRUARO,  
*Minister General of the Franciscans.*

## INTRODUCTION.

THERE still remains something to be done before S. Francis can be thoroughly well known, and it is this conviction which has induced me to write his life once more. In this preface I wish to put forth the reasons of my conviction. If the reader agree with me, perhaps he will follow me with greater confidence in the difficult work that I have undertaken.

The first biography of S. Francis was written less than two years after his death. The author, Thomas of Celano, had been selected by Pope Gregory IX., who was careful of all that could contribute to the glory of his friend, and the choice was in every respect a happy one. Thomas had entered the Order early; he had lived several years with Francis; to say that he had seen him living, is not enough, he had devoured him with his eyes. At every turn we find observations in his history which could only have been made by an attentive and penetrating mind. Nor does he confine himself to what he had seen with his own eyes. When a fact took place beyond his personal observation, he made inquiries amongst those who had had the best opportunities for seeing it. In his introduction, he says that he has often consulted the Saint's familiar friends. Doubtless he began these inquiries during the lifetime of Francis. He hungered after knowledge of him, and would let nothing escape him that could give an insight into the Saint's soul. He is an excellent witness, and there are few who can be compared with him. If Thomas could see, he could describe equally well. It is now established that he is the author of the *Dies iræ*.<sup>1</sup> The grandeur of this sublime

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Panfilo da Magliano, "Storia di S. Francesco e dei Francescani," vol. ii. p. 290.



poem is to be found in places in the biography of Francis. We shall meet with many such examples in our quotations. Here are two that we take out beforehand as specimens. The historian has been relating a fact in which Francis had unmasked a brother whose piety was affected ; he concludes, saying : " We must avoid singularity, which is nothing but a smooth precipice." Elsewhere, speaking of the Saint's relations with God, he shows him passing from one attribute to another, employing all the vital force of his mind and his head to honour each of these attributes, and he ends with these words : " he was not so much a man praying, he was prayer itself." Numerous oratorical digressions, a too frequent inexactness in the chronological order, prevent us from placing him amongst the best historians ; but when he has to relate some anecdote, or to characterise a moral situation, he far surpasses the greater part of the chroniclers of this period.

Need we add that Thomas is worthy of all credence ? This is the declaration he makes in the beginning : " I wish to relate the glorious life of our blessed father, Francis : truth shall be my guide and mistress ; I shall not say everything, because no one knows either all that he did or all that he said, but I shall relate as well as I can what I learned from his own mouth, or from that of faithful witnesses, according to the command given me by the Lord Pope Gregory happily reigning." Better even than this affirmation, perhaps, is the tone of conviction and honesty pervading the entire work. We feel ourselves in presence of a strong, sincere mind, and we soon perceive the man, and even the Saint, underneath the author. Thomas did indeed carry virtue to the degree of sanctity. The Franciscan authors place him amongst the Blessed, and the clergy of Celano keep his feast. At Tagliacozzo, where he died, on Easter Monday they expose his relics for public veneration. Thus we have in him a guarantee of the highest authority. For the sake of those who think that there was nothing but credulity in the Middle Ages, we will add that this Saint

had a very broad mind. For example, this is what he says about several cases of cures of people possessed. "There is almost always much illusion amongst people of that kind, therefore we pass on quickly to greater things."

The Life written by Celano was finished before 1230, for the author does not mention the translation of the remains of Francis, which took place in that year. It was called the "Legend of Gregory IX.," because it was this great Pope who had ordered it to be composed. It seems to have had all the success it deserved. Outside the Order, an apostolic protonotary, called John of Ceperano, made an abridgment of it, which we still have.<sup>1</sup> In the Order itself, a brother of foreign nationality, whom many, with Wadding, think was an Englishman named Kant, translated it into hexameters. Neither the compiler nor the poet limited themselves to a simple reproduction. They were themselves thoroughly well acquainted with the life of Francis. They made use of what they knew, sometimes to relate a fresh fact, sometimes to introduce better order into the events already related. The curious thing is, that it is chiefly the poet who shows himself exact in certain places; he has rendered more than one service to the chronology of S. Francis' life.<sup>2</sup>

These Lives, written at first hand, were soon found to be incomplete. The more Francis entered into glory, the more each brother loved to cite some word that he had said, or to relate an anecdote in which he had taken part. These supplementary accounts were of the greatest interest, and it was thought desirable to fix them lest they should be lost or

<sup>1</sup> This work has remained in MS. The Bollandists have published extracts from it. There is a copy of it in the Mazarine Library.

<sup>2</sup> This poem was published for the first time in 1882 by Sig. Cristofani, the learned historian of the town of Assisi (Prato Guasti). A manuscript copy of this famous poem, dating back to the thirteenth century, has been lately discovered in the Library of Versailles by the Rev. P. Edouard. Two things make this work interesting:—1st. The manuscript is preceded by a prologue, giving the author's name. It is not the Englishman Kant, as was supposed, but a brother named Henry, to whom the title *Magister* is given, a rare occurrence in the Order. 2nd. The copy is interpolated, and relates a certain number of facts borrowed from S. Bonaventura, or unknown before.

forgotten. In 1244, the Provincials of the Order assembled at Genoa in a General Chapter, decided that this work must no longer be delayed. Having elected Crescenzo of Jesi as Minister General, they employed themselves with him on the biography of the holy Founder. The common impression was that the Saint's youth had been inadequately described. Three of his first companions, Rufinus, Angelo Tancredi, and Leo, were appointed to supply what Thomas of Celano had omitted concerning that period. The latter, notwithstanding this omission, was held in high esteem for his work. They begged him to add to his first edition all that had since come to his knowledge, or that he should hereafter learn. The work of the Three Companions appeared first. It opens with a letter addressed to the Minister General, and dated from Grecio, August 10, 1246. The authors protest that they have only written what they had seen with their eyes, or learnt from the most attentive of the companions of Francis. They declare that their intention is not to write a continuous history, but only to collect here and there the facts that had escaped the first writers. We must say that they have done better than they promised. Instead of diffusing themselves over the whole life of the Saint, they have kept almost exclusively to his youth, and instead of "gathering at random like people picking flowers in a meadow," they have strung events together and followed a rigorously chronological order. This is their peculiar merit. The venerable Cardinal Guibert, of happy memory, confessed to me one day that the modern Lives of S. Francis had never interested him. "I could see bright spots in them, but those spots had no connection with each other," he said. This defect was due in great measure to the authors not having read, or having read inattentively, the Three Companions. I will give one example only. In P. Chalippe, or Chavin de Malan, we see Francis make a pilgrimage to S. Peter's in Rome, and suddenly, in coming out of the church, he mixes with the beggars whom he finds on the steps, and begs with them. The act is touching in its humility, but nevertheless

there is something in it that strikes one as impulsive and extraordinary. In the narrative of the Three Companions it is better explained. According to them, Francis had serious thoughts of becoming a mendicant, but first he wished to prove himself and see how far he had strength to carry out this hard line of life. This was the motive of his journey to Rome, where, being unknown, he would have more liberty; here we have a definite idea as well as the manner in which it was carried out, thus making the whole proceeding intelligible.

Celano's work was communicated to the brothers shortly after that of the Three Companions. It is called "Second Life of S. Francis." Not that the author had intended to compose a complete biography, in repeating facts he had already related. The work is entirely new. Except for some pages consecrated to the Saint's youth, Celano has confined himself to narrating a number of inedited anecdotes, which he groups under certain rubrics, according to the subjects they refer to. It is very much the same as what, in the hagiography of the seventeenth century, was called the "Book of Virtues." Thomas confesses ingenuously that he fears he has not come up to his task, though he has made great researches and taken much trouble. He does not repeat the promise of sincerity with which he opened his first Life, but he does what is better, he makes this sincerity felt in every line. Perhaps his narrative is graver, and it inspires more confidence than the first one. Therefore our surprise was great when, some years ago, a learned Professor at the University of Halle, Karl Müller, dared to write in reference to it, that Thomas of Celano *had lied wittingly*.<sup>1</sup> We could

<sup>1</sup> "Die Anfänge des Minoretenordens," p. 181. Fribourg, 1885. Only one of the grievances brought up by the learned Doctor deserves to be noticed. He reproaches Celano with having said nothing in this *Second Life* of the troubles stirred up by Brother Elias. It is true that the historian has not mentioned the brother's name, and true also that he has kept a certain reserve on the subject. The wound was yet bleeding, and he could not uncover it before the eyes of the public. But to affirm that he does not speak of Brother Elias, shows he must have been read very superficially. The brother is alluded to twenty times,



not help thinking it hardly seemed worth while to be a Doctor, if one understood men so little. For ourselves, and, we confidently affirm, for anyone who knows how to read, Celano is honesty itself.

We see how the biography of Francis was formed little by little. It was completed in the most natural manner by a series of informations diligently sought out and carefully controlled. The idea of the Saint grew and increased daily in men's minds. No detail must be lost, everyone who could, brought in some characteristic of that well beloved personality.

Another collection, also furnished with all necessary guarantees, was begun in 1260. S. Bonaventura was elected Minister General of the Order in 1257. At that time he was neither the Saint whom we venerate, nor the Doctor whose doctrines are dear to the Church. But his virtues and his learning had already begun to shine. The brethren hoped much from his government, and their expectations were not deceived. Three months after he entered on his office, he wrote an emphatic circular to the brethren, in which he equally avoided the relaxation that had crept into some convents, and the excessive rigour displayed in others. Two years later, he showed the same moderation and firmness in the collection of Constitutions of the Order, known by the name of "Constitutions of Arles," because the collection was communicated to the Chapter held in the town of that name. The brethren knew that they had found a guide who was at the same time strong and gentle. They entreated him to render another service to the Order, by writing a Life of S. Francis, which they intended should be the final Life. Bonaventura, at the age

even if he is not named. Sometimes the good Celano can scarcely restrain himself. See, for example, pages 233 : *Ubi sunt qui sua benedictione . . .* and 249 : *Tam ampli gregis pastorem nullum, fili, sufficientem intueor.* Against whom are these cutting words directed ? It might be said, with much more foundation, that in this second work Celano has constantly aimed at him who appeared to him the most formidable enemy to the ideal of S. Francis. There was no mistake about it when the time came for a certain kind of conciliation.



of four years, had been snatched from imminent death by the miraculous intervention of Francis. "He would have considered himself ungrateful had he refused to do what they asked of him," he says himself. So he began the work. The biography of Francis continued to be well favoured. After the blessed Celano, "a Saint undertook to write about a Saint," as S. Thomas Aquinas expresses it. The work was published in 1263, and received the title of the "New Legend." It is composed of two distinct parts. In the one, S. Bonaventura publishes the inedited facts that had come to his knowledge after inquiries carried on at Assisi with religious care. In the other, he merely abridges what his predecessors, and especially Thomas of Celano, had related. He repeats the latter almost literally.

The two parts are of very unequal value. The first must be unreservedly accepted as resting on entirely trustworthy testimony. The second, on the contrary, requires constant reference to the original, and that not only because the holy Doctor abridges, as we said, but because even in what he preserves, he alters the narratives in some degree. At times it is simply a question of taste. Thomas of Celano relates vividly the Christmas feast which Francis celebrated towards the end of his life in the woods of Greccio. Characterising the Saint's attitude on this occasion, he says: "he wept with joy, he was broken with tenderness: *pietate contritus*." S. Bonaventura borrows the paragraph, reproduces most of the expressions, but when he comes to *pietate contritus*, he writes *pietate plenus*, the common expression, instead of the dramatic one. It is difficult to understand why he does so. Elsewhere, speaking of the Saint's prayers and his state of rapture at those times, Celano affirms that in the bosom of the Being who is purely One, he was quick to discover multiple aspects, and he went, he says, religiously from one to another of these aspects: *respondere judici, supplicare patri, colloquere amico, colludere sponso*. S. Bonaventura borrows this phrase, but suppresses the two last words, *colludere sponso*. We see here the reason that guided the

holy Doctor. That "playful tenderness," applied to the relation of a man with God, seemed to him too daring. In spite of all his good qualities, he had not, at least not at that time, the bold hand of the author of the *Dies iræ*. In other places it is not only a word, it is the substance that is suppressed. For example, towards the end of his life, S. Francis was greatly troubled by certain restless spirits who desired to practise poverty in a less rigorous form. Thomas of Celano, without overstepping the bounds of discretion, has yet partly revealed his trouble and sorrow to us. We vainly seek for any trace of these revelations in S. Bonaventura. But we must not suspect any bad intentions in the holy Doctor. He was uprightness itself. The truth is, as we have said, that this wise minister aimed at operating a union between the rigorists and the lax; he would have expected all his efforts to have been fruitless if in the Saint's biography he had reported a word or a fact that could furnish arms to either of the two parties. He made a sacrifice to the peace of his Order.

This aim was perhaps legitimate; nevertheless, history has suffered thereby. The evil would have been only half as bad if the primitive Lives had remained in everybody's hand. But, as was to be feared, the same reasons which had held back the Doctor's pen, soon led the brethren to think that minds could never be pacified if others were allowed to say what Bonaventura had thought right to keep silence upon. They therefore resolved, at whatever cost, to forbid the reading of the entire "Ancient Legend," as it now began to be called, that is to say, of the works of Celano, of the Three Companions, and of their abbreviators. In 1226, when assembled in Paris at the Chapter General, they formulated the following decree: "The Chapter General orders, in the name of obedience, that all legends of the blessed Francis written previously, shall be destroyed, and that even outside the Order the brethren shall do their best to make them disappear if they find them, seeing that the one lately written by the General has been written from the testimony

of those who, having lived constantly with the Saint, have had certitude of the facts, and know that it contains nothing but what is approved."

This trying decree at once became the law of the Order. It is true that here and there a few refractory ones were found. The Chronicle of the twenty-four Generals even informs us that long after, they continued to read the "Ancient Legend" in the refectory of the Convent of Avignon, with the connivance, and even by the orders, of the General Gérard de Oddo.<sup>1</sup>

But this was an exception that must have been due to some special reason. In general, the will of the Chapter was executed. The old authors, if they were allowed to exist, were hidden away in the dust of the libraries. There they were so thoroughly lost, that for more than five centuries no one knew what had become of them. Their names alone survived. A day came, when, circumstances having changed, these names were again spoken of honourably. But alas! it is only too well proved that those who quoted them, not excepting even the most conscientious, such as Wadding, had not read their works. Their quotations were only an empty form. Thus S. Bonaventura remained alone. He seems to have sufficed for a long time to satisfy the curiosity of the ever numerous friends of S. Francis. His work had very fine parts. What he had borrowed from his predecessors, what he had discovered by his own researches, his pious Mediæval Latin, his fame as Doctor, and soon his increasing state of holiness, all conferred on the new legend a great charm and great authority. But in time his defects were perceived. The holy Doctor had not followed the order of dates. Strange to say, and it shows the influx of the scholastic spirit, he feared, he said, lest chronology might

<sup>1</sup> Gérard de Oddo was elected Minister General in 1329. The infraction of the decree of 1266 had a fortunate result. A certain Brother Fabian, a Hungarian by birth, doubtless charmed with what he heard, copied several pages, and adding them to the accounts they already possessed, he composed a history, which he called the "Ancient Legend," as the work of Celano. It is from this legend that tradition has drawn all it knows of the primitive authors. Cf. Papini "*Storia di S. Fr.*," tom. ii. p. 243.

introduce confusion into his history. Also, with the exception of the youth and death of the Saint, like Celano, in his second Life, he arranged everything under certain general rubrics, which are nothing more than the dominant virtues of the Saint. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, at least, this artificial order began to be less appreciated, and people wanted to know how the facts had really succeeded each other. Curiosity once awakened, such searching questions were put, that it became necessary, at all costs, to find an answer to them. In the absence of documents they no longer possessed, and that they did not know where to look for, they appealed to the traditions of the Order.

We must always be slow to mistrust tradition. It equals written testimony as long as it keeps to its first exactness. It does good service even when time has mixed much alloy with it. Then tares are mixed with the good grain, but almost always a time comes, when, thanks to some unexpected light, it is possible to separate them. So it has been with the history of S. Francis. The traditions of that history are too recent, and if they can be employed at all, they must be carefully selected. Their defects are apparent, they are constantly in contradiction to the primitive writers. Sometimes they have disfigured the Saint's physiognomy instead of making us acquainted with it. And yet it cannot be denied that they brought some light with them when they appeared. Even in the present day we could not entirely neglect them without losing an important auxiliary. Their very errors give cause for reflection. As the authors wrote upon the spot itself, it is not unusual for them to complete a narrative in the most credible manner. I do not hesitate to say that I have made some study of them. I have read them more than I have quoted them, but I should be ungrateful not to allow that I owe them more than one light. There are three deserving of special mention, because they sum up and represent all the others. They are the "Fioretti," the "Book of Conformities," and the "Chronicles of the Minorites." The "Fioretti," or "Little Flowers of S.



Francis," belong to the fourteenth century. They are supposed to have been written by Giovanni di San Lorenzo, of the noble family of Marignolle, who in 1534 was raised to the episcopal throne of Bisignano. The title of the work indicates well enough what the author had in view. He has chosen from the Saint's Life all the anecdotes which pleased him most, and has related them in a series of short chapters. All these narratives are charmingly told. The style and language are exquisite; sweet, serene piety breathes throughout. In this respect, at least, they are Franciscan. They are so fascinating that one is apt to overrate them. Some would even say that the spirit and epoch of S. Francis has never been better described. But this is going too far. We must not lose sight of the fact that amongst these little narratives some are disfigured by manifest errors. Others, better founded on truth, exaggerate the Saint's words and actions so as to spoil their true beauty. Even the most serious hardly have the sobriety of history.<sup>1</sup> These are great defects. All we can say is, that their author has deserved well of S. Francis. He loved him, and has made others love him. It suffices that we give him this praise, and that occasionally in the course of our work we borrow from his narratives when they seem to us to approach nearly to history.

"The Book of Gold, or of the Conformities of the life of our blessed and seraphic Father Francis with the Life of Jesus Christ our Saviour." Such is the title of the book that was presented to the Chapter at Assisi, in 1399, by a holy

<sup>1</sup> Here is an example of this want of sobriety. Celano relates that when the Saint was in extremity, our Lord spoke thus to him: *Si tota terræ moles et machina mundi aurum esset pretiosum et tibi, pro his quæ pateris duris molestiis, omni dolore sublato, daretur in premium thesaurus gloriæ tantæ, cui predicta auri comparatio nulla esset, nonne gaudens libenter sustineres quæ sustines?* This is how the author of the "Fioretti" translates these words: "Francis, tell me, if all the earth were gold, and if all the seas fountains and rivers were balsam, and if all the mountains hills and rocks were of precious stones, and if thou knewest of a treasure as preferable to all these things as gold is preferable to earth, balsam to water, precious stones to mountains and rocks, and if thy sufferings caused thee to merit that treasure, wouldst thou not be very happy and joyous?" In these lines we have the strength and weakness of the little book. It is very charming, but it is not historic.



Religious named Bartolommeo, a native of Pisa and a very learned man. We perceive at first sight the principal defect of the work. The pious author has made a thesis. It is this : the life of our Lord and that of S. Francis are alike in all points. The book is formed on this idea. It is written, as we should say now, in two columns. In the first column, an important point in the life of our Lord, for instance, *Jesus prophetis cognitus* ; in the second, the same point in S. Francis' life, *Franciscus a prophetis declaratur*. Each time we must arrive at the conclusion : the resemblance is perfect. It is the triumph of the *a priori* that is so dear to true philosophers, and so odious to true historians. The book, which at its first appearance was enthusiastically received, has fallen into complete discredit. People smile in the present day, at the mention of it. Yet it can, and has, furnished more than one piece of information, amongst others this. We know that modern Lives all repeat the fact that Francis, like our Lord, was born in a stable. I have searched our author for this beautiful conformity unknown to all the historians. The reader will be surprised to hear that it is not there. One hundred and seventy years after the death of Francis, neither Bartolommeo of Pisa, and consequently no one else, knew that at the request of an angel the Saint's mother had been carried into a stable at the moment of her delivery. It is well to have ascertained that. The excellent author tells us more positive things. He has really taken trouble, and the erudition he employs in the service of his thesis is very extensive. Sometimes, doubtless thanks to Brother Fabian's legend, of which we have spoken, he comes upon facts related by Celano and neglected by S. Bonaventura. Sometimes, by his personal researches, he even firmly establishes some points that had escaped all his predecessors. Therefore, it is not surprising that he was much read in his day, and that even Wadding declared he had borrowed much from him in the composition of his "Annals." Though the source was not quite pure, there were others much more corrupt.

“Chronicle of the Orders instituted by the seraphic father S. Francis.” There are two important works bearing this title, or something like it. They both belong to the sixteenth century. The first was written by Brother Mariano of Florence, who died in 1527. It is composed of five great volumes in folio, and has never been printed. The second is due to the pen of a brother from Lisbon, named Mark. It was published in three volumes in folio between 1556 and 1568. The author had been through all the provinces of the Order, and has made great use of his Florentine predecessor. We will only speak of him. For the first time we are in presence of a Life in the whole signification of the term. The “Fioretti” are a collection of selected acts, the Conformities are a thesis; Mark of Lisbon wrote a connected and chronological history. He has even realised the conditions of such an enterprise. We are delighted, at the end of his preface, to read: “Now to please and satisfy readers who will meet with things not vulgar in these Chronicles, I have thought to put and arrange here below the names of those authors I principally use in the present history, the which are: the legend of Br. Leo, Br. Angelo, and Br. Rufinus, the legend of Brother Thomas Celano, the great and the little legend of S. Bonaventura, the little flowers of the Religious of S. Francis, the ancient Chronicles, the book of Conformities, &c.” This is a complete reference to the sources, such as we should make in the present day. We are able to take account of the materials employed by the good brother. In the first rank he places the Three Companions and Thomas of Celano. We seem to be a long way from the decree of 1266. But it is only a delusion! The decree is still in effect. Mark of Lisbon did not find the MSS. of those authors, they remained buried in their dust. If he cites them, he does so because of the scraps that had been extracted from them, as we have said, and that he found here and there in the writers of the Order. The true mine from whence he has drawn, is the Life written by S. Bonaventura. All that is indisputable in his chronicles came from there.

Besides that, as he hints, he only had legendaries posterior to the holy Doctor, and the more or less vague traditions he had himself collected. With such incongruous elements, he composed a work that seems to us to have been a marvel of reflection. Certainly it is open to criticism. A thousand details are inexact or are related carelessly. Even the facts drawn from their sources are not always in their right place. These defects are evident, but they do not take away from the great labour of the book. Much reading and much comparing must have been gone through to bring it up to the point. The merit of the brother has been recognised and appreciated as it deserved. The "Chronicles" have been translated and often printed in Spanish, Italian, and French. They were read during a long period.

The seventeenth century added little to those that had preceded it. It saw the appearance of Luke Wadding's great compilation, which bears the name of "Annals of the Minorites." No one can dispute the Irish brother's erudition, nor the rare talent as an historian that he displays. There are few collections of such importance—eight volumes in folio—in which there is as much clearness of style and exactness of order. It is not only easy reading, it is very agreeable also. The more one enjoys all these qualities, the more difficult it is to understand, especially in writing a Life of S. Francis oneself, why the author has confined himself to follow servilely the errors of his predecessors in what concerns the holy Founder. He knows, for he says so, that Celano and the Three Companions wrote the Saint's Life before S. Bonaventura, and though he has a great taste for documents, he does not search for their manuscripts, nor suspect that there may be a treasure in them; he is content to transcribe the incomplete and often altered shreds from them that he finds in Mariano of Florence, or in Mark of Lisbon. It disconcerts us, we forget his merits, and feel almost angry with him. We have to remember, in his excuse, that it is often difficult, even to the highest minds, to detach

themselves from an intellectual situation which has existed for centuries.<sup>1</sup>

The honour of entering on the right road belongs to the Bollandists. To say the truth, this honour does not seem to have cost them very dear. I will not speak of the progress of all kinds which had come about in historical criticism since Wadding's day. The long experience of the learned hagiographers was more than enough to tell them that the witnesses who lived nearest to the events deserved to be placed in the first rank. They knew that this advantage, not to mention others, belonged to Celano and the Three Companions. These old authors, too long hidden in obscurity, were what they had to seek for. But fortune favoured them. Instead of having to hunt after the MSS., as might have been the case, the MSS. themselves were brought to them. Even before they had begun to work on S. Francis, the first Life of Celano was sent them from the Cistercian Abbey of Longpont in the diocese of Soissons. Then they discovered the Three Companions quite near them, in a convent of Minorites in Louvain. Once possessed of these precious documents, they hastened to publish them, together with the Life of S. Bonaventura (2nd vol., October 1769). Now the sources of the history of S. Francis were before the eyes of the public. They had only to read them. To assist this reading, the editors accompanied their publication with a brilliant commentary. It was written by Fr. Constant Suysken, a man of the greatest erudition. It would be difficult to show stronger and more sagacious good sense, either in pointing out the alteration of facts through legend, or in indicating the connection uniting these facts together. It may be said, that the true portrait of S. Francis re-appeared when this satisfactory work came out. Yet the learned critic made one omission that prevented his book from being perfect. He had not had the second Life of Thomas of

<sup>1</sup> I say nothing of P. Chalippe's "*Life of S. Francis*" (1720). It has been much read, and has therefore undeniably done service. But one word suffices to criticise it: it is Wadding in French.



Celano in his hands. It was partly his fault. The Rev. Conventual Fathers in Rome had warned him of the existence of this Life, but, deceived by some rather contradictory texts, he judged too quickly that they had mistaken some pages of supplement for a whole Life, and he passed it by. What we said above of the importance of the work will show the significance of this act. A great gap was left. S. Francis was there, but not entirely yet. Fortunately, a Franciscan, Fr. Rinaldi, supplied what had been left out. He published the second Life in 1806. Devoted to the memory of the holy Founder, at the same time he gave a new edition of the first Life from a MS. that he thought better than the one of Longpont. Now the documents were at last complete. The reader will notice the date. It had taken exactly 540 years to re-establish what the decree of the Chapter of Paris had suppressed with the stroke of a pen.

Italy was the first to take advantage of the materials that had just been brought to light again. A former General of the Conventuals, Fr. Nicolas Papini, made use of them in two works which he published almost simultaneously, and which are both of real value. The first was merely a preparation or an essay: "Notizie sicure sopra S. Francesco e invenzione del suo santo corpo." (Florence, 1822, and Foligno, 1824.) The other is much more considerable; it is the history of the Saint: "La Storia di S. Francesco d'Assisi, opera critica" (2 vols. in 4to. Foligno, 1825). The whole character of the work is contained in those last words, *opera critica*. The author is truly a critic, and an enthusiastic one. How he esteems the contemporary biographers! and what preference he shows for the first amongst them, Thomas of Celano! He makes him the chief witness. He calls him the incomparable historian, the Saint's true disciple, the pure source amongst all others. He almost exclaims, like the father in the parable: he was lost and is found, we must rejoice. On the other hand, the authors of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, who had been so long triumphant, are cast out into darkness. Papini speaks of them with the greatest contempt: "*Non*



*era un 'oca*," "he was no goose," is all the praise he bestows on the charming story-teller of the "Fioretti." Père Chalippe, imitating Wadding, summed up all the work of tradition. He uses him as a scape-goat. He pitilessly points out his mistakes, and overwhelms him with sarcasm. "What a fine invention! Where did he find all that? What a paradox! What a blunder!" But through all this we feel that we are in presence of a penetrating mind, and of a workman who spares himself no trouble. He has thoroughly searched through the primitive biographies. He wished, at all costs, to give a faithful portrait of his holy Founder. But he wrote at a bad time. He had not the least sentiment for art or human life. Could any one believe that he thus divided the two volumes of his work: 1st vol., Facts from the life of the Saint which have a certain date; 2nd vol., Facts from the life of the Saint which have no certain date? A Bollandist of our own day (Fr. de Smedt) has written, in his "Principles of Criticism," some very fine pages on the use of induction, and even of conjecture, by the best and most reserved historians. Papini, whose mind is active and his good sense somewhat small, has not the least idea of this method, one which, among other advantages, enables an author to avoid dryness without violating exactness.

Calmer, though quite as decided in his principles, was the Rev. Fr. Panfilo de Magliano, a Minor of the Observance, who died only a few years ago. In 1874 and 1876 he published two volumes in 18mo, entitled: "*Storia compendiosa di S. Francesco e dei Francescani*." Only half of the first volume is consecrated to S. Francis, hence it is an abridgment, but this abridgment answers all the requirements of history. Its method is good, the information is certain and correct, and its sincerity is convincing as well as pleasing. I have greatly regretted that he had prematurely departed from this world when, in 1878, I made my first journey to Rome. He would have taught me many things.

There is no work equal to this in France, from a critical

point of view. Not that we have not written upon S. Francis since the beginning of the century. But while showing great talent, most of the French authors have unfortunately followed the old condemned ways. They always abridge and rejuvenate P. Chalippe. One only has worked on his own account, that is Chavin de Malan.<sup>1</sup> Besides, he has kept to the sources he found in the Bollandists. Celano's second Life was published in Rome during a stormy time in the empire. The humble books with difficulty survived all the confusion and disturbance. There were but very few copies of the edition, and it had not reached France when Chavin de Malan began to work. Nor did he seek it, though he was a librarian and had notice of it in his hands. The result is, that his work, so justly esteemed, and in parts, of great interest, of necessity remains insufficient.

It would be ungrateful to forget M. Ozanam. His volume, "The Franciscan Poets in Italy," has rendered signal service to the history of S. Francis. He has only touched on one point, but that point is the soul of the subject, and he has touched it with a master hand. No one is more brilliant, or more sympathetic.

After this explanation, the reader will perhaps understand on what grounds I said at the beginning, that something still remains to be done before S. Francis can be thoroughly known. Six centuries have gone by, and all the contemporary witnesses have not yet been heard ; at least in France this is the case. This state of things was intolerable to me, and my resolution to write this history arose from that. I thought it was time, and more than time, to rejoice the Saint's admirers by bringing these witnesses before them. This has been my great aim. I have attached myself to those venerable historians who loved the Saint, and who were Saints themselves. Not only have I read and re-read them, I have carefully compared

<sup>1</sup> Another exception must be made for Frederic Morin's little volume : "S. François et les Franciscains," 1853. The author has not only had recourse to the sources, but, thanks to his knowledge of general history, he has made a very original use of the documents known in his time.

them with one another. Thanks to this long intercourse, all their treasures have passed into my hands, and I have poured these treasures into what I wrote. It is they—the blessed Thomas of Celano, the Three Companions, S. Bonaventura—who will be found in my book. The book lives with their life; it has grown from their substance. My care has been to frame what they said, and to do my best to produce a united account from their different recitals.<sup>1</sup>

I have striven no less to supply another want. It seems to me, that up to this time those who have written have not borrowed enough light from general history. We must not overlook this point. It is rare that a Saint has lived so thoroughly in the spirit of his age. He began by being an accomplished representative of it. His fellow-citizens named him the “flower of their youth.” That signified that he loved beyond all else the two things that were then held to be the most beautiful—poetry and chivalry. His biographers have in reality said all that was necessary on this subject, but they say it as those who, living in that social state, cared little to attract attention to what everyone knew. In the present day, it would be impossible to understand them, if one were not already initiated into that civilisation.

It is the same with the Saint's mission. He was to ecclesiastical history what Joan of Arc was to French history. God took him, as He did the *Good Lorrainer*, out of all common grooves, to accomplish a work that His ordinary instruments knew not how to perform. It is this that made him a liberator. How could we understand this part unless we knew the state of the Church at that moment, the dangers it incurred through feudal riches, and the vain attempts that

<sup>1</sup> While drawing principally from those sources which are the largest, I have not neglected others, which, though smaller, also contain useful indications. The chief of these secondary sources are: “*Giordano di Giano Chronica*,” published in the *Analecta Franciscana*, tom. i.; 2nd, “*Bernardo da Bessa, De laudibus B. Francisci*,” MS. in the Library of the University of Turin, i. vi. 33; 3rd, “*Fr. Salimbeur Chronica*,” Parma, 1857; 4th, “*Th. Eccleston, De Adventu Fratrum minorum in Angliani*,” London, 1858.

had been already made to come back to primitive simplicity? But to those who are conversant with these circumstances, the whole thing explains itself. Poverty, so passionately loved by Francis, appeared not only as a virtue, but as an heroic remedy for the evils of a period involved in perplexities. Finally, God made of him the benefactor of civil society, after he had been the benefactor of religious society. His Third Order, the most original of his inventions, introduced greater justice and more peace amongst men. It is no exaggeration to say that he powerfully ameliorated the condition of people. Yet this salutary revolution has escaped the notice of most historians. The reason of this is simple: they had not sufficiently thrown light upon the documents they read, by an exact acquaintance with the social organisation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the course of this work, the reader will find the lights which history, patiently consulted, has furnished me with on all these points. If I am not mistaken, the information that I have thus gained is of such a nature as partly to make the subject new.

Now that I have begun to be confidential, I may be excused if I go further, and say with what spirit this long study has been animated. Francis, born of a Provençale mother, was always attracted towards France. This was the case to a far greater extent than has been known. His youth unfolded beneath the influence of our best *Chansons de geste*. No sooner had he entered on his mission than he started to come to us. When he had attained to a state of sanctity, he spoke French, says Celano, every time that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. According to the same author, he expressed his joy in the same tongue. He sang French songs. At the end of his life, his often expressed wish was to die amongst our people. He knew, and he said, that we should give him special honour in the future. Such an open and constant preference surely creates obligations for us. We are bound to make some return. Our forefathers felt this; for centuries they gave the names of François



and Françoise to half their sons and daughters. I own that I have inherited their piety. It has been good to me to make known, as well as I could, a Saint who loved us so well. I seemed to be paying a debt.

I have now exposed all my ideas. If good will sufficed for success, I think I should have a chance of succeeding. But success, in a work of this nature, depends on higher conditions. The mind of a saint and of an artist are required for it. I have done what I could. The reader must be lenient if he finds that I have not come up to my task. He may be sure that I have groaned over my insufficiency more than he will ever groan over it. I repeat for the hundredth time Dante's beautiful words: "Such a life would be much better sung in heaven."

*July 14, 1889, Feast of S. Bonaventura.*

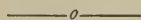




# HISTORY

OF

## SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI.



### CHAPTER I.

#### HIS LIFE IN THE WORLD, 1181-1204.

SAINT FRANCIS was born at Assisi, in Umbria, in the year 1181. The anniversary of his birth is kept on the 26th September in his native place, where a splendid church has been erected to his memory. The date, though not positively certain, is probably correct.

His father, Pietro Bernardone, according to a document of some authority, was descended from the Moriconi, a Tuscan family inhabiting the little town of Lucca.<sup>1</sup> Pietro's

<sup>1</sup> The document is as follows :—Octavius, Bishop of Assisi, relates in a book, entitled “*Lumi Serafici di Portioncula*,” printed at Venice in 1701, that, while preaching the Lent in the cathedral church of Lucca, in 1689, a canon showed him an *authentic* ancient memorandum, in which he read these words :—“There were at Lucca two brothers, merchants, named Morico. One remained in his own country, the other, called Bernard, went and settled at Assisi, where he was surnamed Bernardone. He married, and had a son named Pietro, who, being rich, married a girl named Pica, of noble family. S. Francis was his son.” The learned historian of Assisi, A. Cristofani, disputes the authority of this testimony. They are pretensions, he says, inspired by local patriotism. He may be right, but we differ from him—(1) because the history of Assisi has retained no memory of any of the ancestors of S. Francis ; (2) because on a memorable occasion we find Pietro Bernardone addressing himself to his friends and neighbours, making no mention of relatives. These two undoubted facts point, we think, to a recent settlement of the family in Umbria. The probability of this is still greater when

father, leaving the family mansion in possession of his brother, had founded a new house in Assisi, where he followed the trade of a cloth merchant. Some biographers have tried to prove that S. Francis was of noble extraction; his history, as we shall see, gives no support to the idea. His parents were merchants, but their business was a very important one. It is natural to imagine that in those remote times commerce was limited almost entirely to the town in which it was exercised. This is a mistake. Commercial intercourse between the various cities of Italy had always existed, and from the end of the eleventh century it had begun to pass the frontier, and to become frequent with the south of France. In both countries, the principal cities, being rich, enfranchised, and independent, had formed treaties of commerce and friendship with each other. They were, besides, united into a sort of offensive and defensive league, and in case of need they raised troops to fight against the Arabs of Spain, whom they regarded as the common enemies of their faith and industry.<sup>1</sup> Also, we must remember that at the period we are about to speak of, chivalry was in its glory. It was the occasion of a constant recurrence of *fêtes*, in which knights and burgesses vied with each other in the display of luxury and ornament. Thus the sellers of cloth, gold and silver brocades, and furs, found numerous markets for their wares. They were continually passing from one country to another, and, if clever, were able to realise large profits, and rapidly accumulate considerable fortunes. Such was doubtless the position of the father of S. Francis. The biographers tell us that he went often to France, and by his

we find that Lucca was then the only place in the continent of Italy that was a centre for the manufacture of precious materials, and that the Moriconi were in the first ranks of the corporation of manufacturers. Cf. Francisque Michel, "*Recherches sur le commerce, la fabrication et l'usage des étoffes de soie, d'or et d'argent.*" 2 vols. in 4to. Paris, 1854.

<sup>1</sup> M. Fauriel, from whom this detail is taken, affirms that the confederate towns frequently drove away the Arabs from the islands of the Mediterranean, and wrested important places from them even in Spain. "*Histoire de la littérature provençale,*" tom i. page 47.

commerce between the two countries had become very rich. The mother of S. Francis was named Pica, and there is little doubt that she was of noble birth. If we can believe the unanimous assertion of modern historians, both French and Italian, she was also a Frenchwoman and a Provençale. The fact is not proved by any precise documents, but is more than probable. Possibly Pietro Bernardone, young, rich, and looked upon as a rising man, may have been sent by his father into France, and there sued for and obtained the hand of a noble young maiden. In the south especially, alliances of this kind were not uncommon. But we find yet more convincing evidence in the sensible influence of Provence on the youth of our Saint. He knew its language from an early age. Who could have taught it to him if it were not his mother, who, having spoken it herself from her childhood, would, in the midst of her new countrymen, continue to regard it as the *most delectable speech* that there was in the world? As a young man he was enthusiastic for the Provençal institutions that were penetrating on all sides into Italy—the gay science, the courts, the songs of love and of arms. Who could have given him the strong bias towards this civilisation except the noble lady whose early years had been spent in the midst of those *fêtes*, and who, keeping them fresh in her memory, by frequent recitals inflamed, perhaps a little imprudently, the imagination of her son? Beyond her origin, we know scarcely anything about the mother of S. Francis. One historian says that she was simple and indulgent, another that she loved all things honest, and that in her manners there was much virtue; and they do not make us further acquainted with her.

To family influences must be added those of external nature, to which the fervent soul of the young Italian was especially sensitive. Umbria, his birth-place, is the centre and heart of Italy—it may almost be called the Eden of the land, so rich are its harvests, so plentiful its streams, so vigorous and varied its vegetation. The nights, in that transparent atmosphere, are brilliant and splendid, and it

is no exaggeration to speak of them as glorious. The mountains on the horizon rise majestically, but their harmonious outline seems in proportion to human comprehension, and gives no impression of overwhelming force. The inhabitants have always been noted for a combination of serenity and strength. The ancient Romans, who understood human nature, appreciated their military courage. The Church drew from them her best defenders in the long struggles she sustained in the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century, one of those excellent ambassadors<sup>1</sup> whom the Venetians had in all countries, causing them to be the best informed politicians in the world, wrote to the Most Serene Republic, that what struck him most in Umbria was to find the religion of honour professed there by simple peasants as it was elsewhere by gentlemen. As to religion properly so-called, religion towards God, it had its own special character of fervour and enthusiasm. It was Umbria who invented the banner, of which it has been well said, that in the domain of sacred painting it stands in the same position as the hymn does in that of poetry.<sup>2</sup> The faith of these pious people made them the first to desire that the image of the protecting Saint should be set up on high and borne before them, and from Nelli to Raphael nearly all the Umbrian painters have worked to satisfy this need. Chivalrous and religious sentiments are the distinguishing marks of this race, and in this respect who could be more Umbrian than Francis? We shall see him as a young boy dreaming of the exploits of the paladins, and popular admiration has summed up his life in one word, calling him the Gonfalonier or Standard-bearer of Jesus Christ.

The infant was baptised in the cathedral church of S.

<sup>1</sup> This was Badoër, a noble Venetian, accredited to the Duke of Urbino. His report is of 1570, a time when ideas of liberty and honour had lost their influence in the rest of Italy. See "History of the Dukes of Urbino," by Ugolini, vol. ii. pages 325-330.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rio, "De l'Art chrétien," vol. ii. page 180.



Rufinus, probably on the day of his birth, and by his mother's desire he received the name of John. It is related that, as he was being carried back to the paternal house in his nurse's arms, a stranger came up and wished to look at him and embrace him. After a little hesitation, they gave him permission to do so. He took the child in his arms, gazed on him for a time with a joyful countenance, and having signed him with the cross on his shoulders, gave him back saying: "Take great care of him, he is destined to high things, and will become one of the most perfect servants of God in this world." After which he disappeared. This happened during an absence of Pietro Bernardone, who was then in France on business. Hearing of the birth of his son, he hastened his return, and his first act, when he had looked well at the child, was to change his name and declare that he should be called Francis. What motive guided him to make this alteration, whether it was a feeling of admiration for the country he had just quitted, or a pretty compliment to his wife to give the name of her native land to his first born, we do not know, but the fact remains that this name, which before then was so uncommon that Pietro thought he had invented it, was to become one of the most famous names in the annals of the Saints and of glory.

We know very little about the first years and the education of S. Francis. Only one of his biographers mentions them, and he does so in too stilted a style; but from his vague words we seem to infer that there was a want of firmness and discipline in his training. The child was amiable and engaging, and he was immoderately loved and spoiled. From his earliest years he was allowed to indulge his fancies without restraint, and as he grew older all the attractions of luxury and riches awaited him. He was in danger of becoming enervated in mind, but his parents, feeling their incompetency to train him properly, took a wise resolution. The priests of a neighbouring church, that of S. George, had, like most of the clergy of that period, opened a school for the instruction of the young. Francis was intrusted to them.

They initiated him in the Christian life, and endeavoured, as far as was in their power, to instruct him in letters. The pupil, though his mind was quick and subtle, does not seem to have made much progress under their tuition. His early years had been a bad preparation for applying himself to study. He learnt Latin after a fashion, but, says S. Bonaventura, his literary culture was incomplete.

Besides, he gave but a few years to study. He was still very young when his father associated him with himself in his commerce. In this new field his success was not far off. It was evident that active qualities were pre-eminent in him. From the first he showed the prudence, quickness of perception, and the affable, pleasant manners that make a good man of business. Pietro Bernardone was delighted. He had found an assistant for the present, and could promise himself for the future a successor who would continue his work. His highest hopes were realised, and he showed his satisfaction by treating the youth with entire confidence and giving him a generous share in the profits of the house. Unfortunately, the career begun under such happy auspices was before long exposed to a great temptation. Just at this time, when Francis was beginning life, the taste for *fêtes* and displays of chivalry was daily becoming stronger amongst his fellow-countrymen. For two centuries this taste had been on the increase in Italy. In the south, the Norman Kings of Sicily, anxious to imitate the French court; in the north, the Emperors of Germany, in their frequent residences in Lombardy, had given the example, and the little feudal courts, especially those of Este, Verona and Montferrat, were not slow in following it. The cities too, as soon as they became independent, must, like the emperors and princes, have their plenary courts, and although wars were incessant, there were constant tournaments, carousals, and public rejoicings going on. Large and richly decorated halls were erected in the squares for hearing the improvisators and singers. In the second half of the twelfth century, a fact that has received little notice increased this enthusiasm, or

rather passion. From 1180 to 1200, that is, during the childhood and early youth of Francis, four of the greatest troubadours of Provence went to Italy and sojourned chiefly in the northern and central courts.<sup>1</sup> They brought with them the works that had made their fame on the other side of the Alps, and either sang them themselves or had them sung by the jongleurs in the principal towns. It is difficult for us in the present day to understand the enthusiasm that was then inspired by that kind of poetry. M. Guizot has well said : " In the childhood of society, poetry is not only a pleasure and a national diversion, it is a source of progress, it elevates and developes the moral nature of men at the same time that it amuses and excites them." The mediæval poets, with seductive grace, celebrated love, high courage, courteous manners, as well as the romantic adventures of Charlemagne's knights or the heroes of the Round Table. The young and ardent listened eagerly to these recitals and to these simple yet refined tales. They seemed like the revelation of a life superior to their own, and many, dazzled by its brilliance, were loth to return to their ordinary occupations. They were inclined to believe that life, as they knew it, was not worth living.

Francis did not go so far as this ; he kept to his business, but it is certain that he did not throw himself into it with the same ardour as before. No one was better prepared than he for these festivals for the mind and for the eyes. His early education, his knowledge of the French language, his lively, facile humour, the vein of adventure and daring that was to be found in his character, all made it easy for him to understand and enjoy them. He was not satisfied with enjoying them only, he became their promoter amongst his companions. Assisi was too small a place to attract many foreign troubadours, it must rely upon its own resources. Francis understood this, and hastened to form a court, or, as we should now call it, an association, devoted to the gay

<sup>1</sup> They were Bernard de Ventadour, Cadenet, Raimbaud de Vaqueras and Pierre Vidal. Fauriel : " Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes," tom. iv. page 30.

science and to poetry. He invited all the young men in the town and neighbourhood who agreed with him to join it. The Saint's biographers are severe upon these young men. One says, "they did evil and they brought evil"; another, that "he drew them after him like a tail of iniquity." Francis was far from judging them thus hardly himself. They had named him their chief, and he delighted in their society. At their call he would rise even from table with his parents, and follow them, though his father and mother might be vexed at being thus left. He walked at their head as they went through the streets, showing, by his air of dignity and grandeur, the importance he attached to his position. Sometimes in the evening he would assemble them at sumptuous feasts, in "corporation banquets," his historians say. He encouraged them to eat and drink, and afterwards they went about the town singing in the silence of the night. Francis had a sweet, melodious voice; he knew the songs of the troubadours better than any one else, and doubtless he often sang them on these occasions.

The life was an expensive one; it swallowed up all his gains, and was leading him into other habits that were no less costly. Being obliged to appear often in public, and having moreover a secret leaning to all that savoured of opulence, Francis began to seek for fine garments. He could not find materials rich enough to please him. They must be soft and flowing,<sup>1</sup> says one of his biographers. And this was not enough; he wished to attract observation to himself more completely, and had his clothes cut in a strange and peculiar manner, so that he was sometimes to be seen wearing a garment of which one half was of some precious stuff and the other of the coarsest cloth.<sup>2</sup> His historians tell us that this was a proof of the love of pomp and display that was in his nature, and not merely one of the odd fashions of the day.

His parents were becoming uneasy about him. "Our son

<sup>1</sup> "In vestibis mollibus et fluidis."—I Cel., page 4.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps in imitation of the troubadours and jongleurs.



no longer belongs to us," they said to each other; "one would think he was the son of a prince." But as their fortune was large, they did not attempt to restrain him, not wishing, says one of the biographers, to trouble him about money. They have sometimes been accused of avarice, but without the least foundation. They provided him with abundant means, and defended him against the neighbours who, astonished at his prodigality, took upon themselves to make the remark that he lived like a prince. "What is that to you?" replied his mother; "our son does indeed live like a prince, but have patience, the day will come when he will live like a son of God." She added that he would be the father of many children for God. Perhaps it was only her maternal love, believing in her son's goodness in spite of appearances, that inspired her with these then improbable ideas, or it may have been some recollection of the prediction of the stranger on the day of his baptism.

Meanwhile, Francis gave himself up more than ever to empty amusements and pleasures. We have seen him in the midst of noisy, tumultuous dissipations, but he was no less capable of enjoyment of a quieter and more solitary nature. Assisi hangs, as it were, on the sides of the Apennines. From its terraces, as from an amphitheatre, the eye ranges over the spacious valley of Umbria, with its streams, its groves of olive trees, and its belt of high mountains. It is a view that attracts and fascinates. Everywhere, perhaps especially in Italy, those who inhabit such privileged spots are sensible to the beauties of nature. The glorious spectacle is ever before them; sunrise and sunset, the play of light and cloud, the fresh tints of spring and the varied colours of autumn; and, unconsciously, even if they are unable fully to appreciate the beauty, their minds are impressed by the magnificence of the works of the Creator. This impression was most vivid on the mind of young Francis. He became very early one of the most passionate of the lovers of nature. He was often seen to leave the town and wander alone amongst the mountains, and, coming suddenly upon some beautiful or



extensive prospect, he would be quite overcome by it, and fall into a state of rapture and contemplation. Nor was grand scenery alone needful to call up his emotions. A meadow carpeted with flowers, the vines hanging in garlands amongst the trees, a rivulet streaming from the hills and flowing along the valley, were enough ; he would stand still in ecstasy, and, giving the reins to his fancy, would be absorbed in the multitude of thoughts that thronged in his soul. Nature will one day reveal to him her true secret ; by her changeful aspect and her fleeting beauty she will speak to him of the eternal beauty of Him who has given her to man. Then, his historians tell us, he will make every creature a step by which to ascend to God. But at this time he was far from that perfection. What fascinated him now in nature was her freshness, her smiles, her tenderness, and all the charms she continually offers to those who have eyes to perceive them.

The life of Francis was becoming a sort of enchantment. But we must not exaggerate this expression, as has been sometimes done. Though he might be dazzled, he was never thrown off the right path. He remained master of himself, and never gave way to pride of heart or overbearing manners, nor did he ever pass the bounds of an upright nature. The poetry of this period delighted to make love, its favourite subject, an internal principle of moral elevation, a source of respect and nobility.<sup>1</sup> Such at least is the effect that long intercourse with this poetry seems to have produced in the mind of Francis. No one ever heard from his lips an injurious or disgraceful word. He was always courteous and chaste. His companions did not all attain this perfection of the true knight. Some of them were addicted to unbecoming jokes. Francis did not think he had the right to impose silence on them, but he made it a rule never to take part

<sup>1</sup> "Love is the common argument of both kinds of poetry (songs and romances), and it is love conceived of in the same aspect—chivalrous, enthusiastic, free from all sensuality, a principle of morality, the mainspring of every generous and glorious deed."—Fauriel, "*Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*," tom. iv. page 204.

in such conversation. "God guarded him with special care," S. Bonaventura says. His flesh, which was afterwards to bear the sacred stigmata of our Saviour, was preserved virginal.

Such unflinching virtue made a great impression on his contemporaries. Self-mastery in the midst of strong temptation called forth their highest admiration. He was called the flower of the young men of Assisi, and he was generally beloved. People felt a presentiment in their hearts that the future would be his: throughout the province they said that he would become great. One man, a simple inhabitant of the town, according to S. Bonaventura, embodied this general impression by a picturesque, almost allegorical, act, as was the custom in those days. Meeting Francis in the streets, he pulled off his mantle and spread it under his feet, saying to the astonished spectators, "I give honour beforehand to a man who will accomplish many great acts, and to whom the faithful of the whole world will pay homage." A noticeable fact encouraged these expectations. This young man, who had been so intoxicated with the world, suddenly became very charitable. He had always loved the poor. He told his first disciples after his conversion that he never could hear a poor man ask charity for the love of God, without being touched in his inmost heart. But he now began to open his hand more liberally to the needy, and it is remarkable that it was his worldly extravagance that, contrary to custom, became the determining cause of his generosity. With that straightforward sense which was gradually to reveal all truth to him, he said to himself, "If you can be gracious and magnificent towards men from whom you can expect but passing favour, is it not just that you should be gracious and magnificent towards the poor for the sake of God, who returns everything with usury?" From that time he regarded them with greater pleasure than before, and was more ready to relieve them. One day, however, he treated a beggar rather roughly. He was at his business, which, as we said, he had not discontinued, and he was surrounded by clients, when the poor man

appeared. The moment was badly chosen. Francis was irritated and sent him away. Almost immediately he repented, and leaving the buyers and the wares, he ran after him and repaired his fault generously. The way in which he reproached himself for this error deserves to be noticed. He found that he had been quite wanting in politeness. "If this man," he said, "had come in the name of some great baron or count, you would have given him everything he wanted: how much more should you have welcomed him when he came in the name of the King of kings and Lord of lords?" This is an instance of the spirit of the Middle Ages, of the faith which saw in the poor the ambassadors of God Himself, and of the reverence to Him which sought to do Him honour by receiving them with all respect. The lesson was not lost upon Francis. He promised before God never to refuse an alms if he could make it, and he kept his promise. S. Bonaventura sees in this the origin of the choice graces that were to transform his life.

Before we reach that decisive point, we find one more fact which adds another feature to his character. He was a little more than twenty years old when war broke out between Assisi and Perugia. We do not hear from the historians what was the cause of this quarrel between the neighbouring towns. The biographers of the Saint fix their eyes steadily on their hero, looking neither to left nor right; it may be said of them, as of many chroniclers of the present day, that the world in which they lived had no existence for them. Fortunately, the archives of the town have preserved the explanation they have not given us. It was a question of that great communal movement which changed the face of Europe in the twelfth century. Assisi had already begun to feel its renovating influence. In 1177, under the very eyes of Conrad of Urslingen, whom the Emperor Barbarossa had sent from Germany, with the titles of Duke of Spoleto and Count of Assisi, to guard against any attempts at national or popular enfranchisement, the commune, following the example of the northern towns, had instituted consuls to

represent and defend their interests. On the accession of Innocent III. in 1196, its soldiers had besieged, taken, and, in spite of the Pontiff's prohibition, had rased the redoubtable citadel of Sasso Rosso, which dominated the town, and had, since its erection, served as an instrument of the tyranny of the foreigners. This success, though great, did not satisfy them. In order to be quite secure from incursions, the inhabitants rebuilt and fortified the town ramparts; then, becoming aggressive, they decided that the strong castles of the feudatories who refused to make peace with them should be taken by assault and demolished. The execution of this design brought on the war we have spoken of. After several defeats, the feudal lords, fearing the complete ruin of their cause, took a desperate step. Perugia was the ancient rival of Assisi. They went to her magistrates and engaged themselves to acknowledge their suzerainty, if they would bring the burgesses and nobles of Assisi, who supported them, to reason. The magistrates were not slow in profiting by such a favourable occasion, and their troops immediately began the campaign. The people of Assisi were unanimous against the disloyal citizens and their allies. They agreed at once to accept the challenge: the soldiers of the commune imprudently marched out of the town, with banners flying, to face the enemy.<sup>1</sup> The battle was fierce and bloody; it went against Assisi. A great number of soldiers, nearly all the nobles, and Francis, who had fought bravely in the first ranks amongst them, were all taken prisoners. A question arose at the entrance to the prison at Perugia. The young captive was not noble, should he be confined with the nobles? The decision arrived at was quite correct from the point of view of that time. An article in the ancient statutes of Avignon, which have served as the type of a great number of municipal charters, said that honourable burgesses, that is, as they explained it, those who, without being knights, lived as such, should enjoy the franchises and privileges of knights. At

<sup>1</sup> These details are taken from Cristofani, "History of Assisi," vol. i. pages 83-95.



Perugia the same opinion prevailed, and Francis, though not a knight, because his manners were noble, was placed with the knights. His behaviour amongst them soon drew their attention. Most of them, after the first few days, became a prey to melancholy. They regretted their lost liberty, and grew silent and depressed. Francis, on the contrary, kept up his spirits, and affected as great cheerfulness as ever. One of his companions reproached him, thinking his conduct trivial and unbecoming. Francis easily showed him that there is courage in bearing misfortunes well ; then he added : " I seem to astonish you, but you may expect still greater surprises. One day the whole world will adore me." He may have said these words with a smile, in allusion to the speech of the Unknown at Assisi, of which his companion probably knew, or there may have been something of pride in his tone, and this sort of prediction may have been the inspired confidence of a young man, who, feeling the divine fire burning within him, gave himself up to unbounded hopes. However it may have been, it is certain that Francis remained singularly independent amongst his fellow prisoners. One of them had made himself unbearable by his insolent manners, and the others resolved to have no more intercourse with him. Francis, who always inclined to indulgence rather than to severity, and, doubtless for this reason, was called by the old French historians the *débonnaire jouvencel*,<sup>1</sup> thought the punishment too severe. He declared that, for his part, he would have nothing to do with it, and he continued to be with the offender as before, paying him all the little attentions that were in his power. His patience was rewarded, the knight's overbearing temper was gradually softened, and Francis had the pleasure of reconciling him with those whom he had offended so deeply. A year passed away in this manner, and then a convention was entered into between the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "La vie de Saint François," printed in the sixteenth century by Simon Vostre. The original edition is very rare. I have consulted a precious copy in the library of M. F. Marquis. It has been reprinted at the expense of Prince Galitzin under the title of "Vie et légende de Monsieur Saint François," Douniol, 1865.



two cities, and the prisoners returned to Assisi. Francis went back to his ordinary occupations, and for three years he led the life of business and amusements that we have described, during which period his biographers have not found any new incident worthy of being recorded. Probably there was nothing more to be revealed, and we seem to know all that is necessary concerning his youth. We can easily imagine him as he appeared to his contemporaries, young, active, full of eager emotions and capabilities of enjoyment, ardent and enterprising, and at the same time gracious and gentle in his manners, refined and agreeable towards all men. His was a plastic nature, full of resources and contrasts, that men loved as soon as they knew. It enabled him through all his different phases to retain the faculty of attracting hearts to himself. His body was not less endowed than his soul. He was of middle height, and of rather small make; want of strength in his appearance was compensated by his air of refinement. His face was oval, with a smooth brow, dark eyes, a well-proportioned nose, and a beautiful mouth. His skin was white and delicate, his hair chestnut, his beard black and scanty. We have already mentioned his melodious voice. Historians add that his speech was agreeable, clear and animated.

In the next chapter we shall see by what ways God, who had created him to be one of His best servants, led him from these natural gifts to virtue, that, revealing perfection to him at one glance, enabled him to aspire after it without a moment's hesitation.

## CHAPTER II.

### HIS CONVERSION, 1205-1207.

"THE life of man is miserably short. It is reckoned from his first entrance into the world ; I should be inclined to count it only from the birth of reason, and from the time when reason begins to stir within us, which does not generally take place before the age of twenty."<sup>1</sup> S. Francis would have agreed with these words, and doubtless would have added humbly that he was not twenty, but alas ! nearly twenty-five when he received the salutary shock which stirred all his faculties and formed his mind.

This shock came to him, as it often does to those whose active life needs to be arrested for a time. He was attacked by a severe illness, and for long days he was a prey to suffering. In this hard school he learned many lessons. The current of his thoughts was changed, we are told by two of his historians, and then they relate a circumstance which gives us an idea of the extent of this change. While he was still very weak and obliged to support himself with a stick, he walked through the various rooms in his father's house and looked longingly out of the open doors and windows. This did not satisfy him, he wished to go out of doors, to get into the country. Like all convalescents, he yearned to be once more in the sunshine, in the midst of nature and of men. He felt as if his returning life would be cheered and strengthened by the sight of the fresh country and all the beautiful places he knew and loved so well. But to his great astonishment, he found that the ancient charm had fled ! His eyes, which had looked death in the face, now seemed unable to discern the smiling beauty of earth. His mind,

<sup>1</sup> Pascal, " Discourse on the Passions of Love."

that had had glimpses of eternity, could not find satisfaction in the transitory things of this world. He did not know himself. Overcome, without being aware of it, by the realisation of human infirmity, he found that he could no longer "regard perishable things otherwise than as perishing, or already perished,"<sup>1</sup> and he returned slowly and sadly home. The impression he experienced was so strong that he wondered how he could have fed himself with such unsubstantial nourishment, and he was ready to tax with folly himself and all those who had no more solid foundations for their happiness.

This was the first stroke of divine grace. From that day Francis was weaned from the fascination of externals, and, convinced that he had not yet found the right way of employing his life, he determined henceforth to strive after a higher state. This conviction, by stifling in him the pride of youth, prepared him to be more attentive and submissive to the teaching of events and to the admonitions of God.

His recovery was rapid, and he had quite regained his strength when there was a report in Assisi that one of the noblest and richest of its lords was about to start for Apulia to take part in the war that was going on there. This war had broken out on the death of Henry VI., Emperor of Germany, who had become King of Sicily through his marriage with Constance, the heiress of the Norman princes. Henry had left a son under age, and the empress, at the instigation of the national party, entrusted him to the guardianship of Pope Innocent III. But Markwald, a lieutenant of the late emperor, encouraged by the German nobles, claimed the guardianship for himself, alleging that he was in possession of a testament by which Henry had appointed him to this office. They appealed to arms, and the cause of Innocent was on the decline, when he placed it in the hands of one of the most brilliant of the representatives of French chivalry. This was Walter of Brienne, who, by

<sup>1</sup> Pascal. Fragment, "On the conversion of a sinner."

his wife Albinia, was allied to the ancient Norman dynasty. His impetuous courage soon brought victory to the pontifical troops. He inflicted bloody defeats upon the Germans at Capua and Cannæ, and it seemed as if he would carry all before him. His name became famous throughout the peninsula, where the Germans were not loved.<sup>1</sup>

The praises of their conqueror were everywhere celebrated, and on all sides people were extolling his piety, his heroism, and his liberality. Even the historians of S. Francis, though ignorant of as much as the names of military events, bear witness to his renown, always calling him the *gentle Count*. It was to this captain that one of the knights of Assisi was about to offer his services, and it was reported that he was full of hope, believing that he was going to make his fortune and cover himself with glory.

The news came to Francis like a flash of light. He saw in it an indication from heaven, and thought at once that he ought definitely to follow the career of arms. He was naturally courageous, and he was prepared to face all hazards. The cause he wished to defend was that of the Sovereign Pontiff, and though ideas of nationality were then rather confused, it may have seemed to him, besides, the cause of Italy against foreign tyrants. Perhaps in this profession he could satisfy that longing for a higher life that had begun to

<sup>1</sup> In Sicily the people in their hatred, gave the name of *German manners* to insolence, pillage, and injustice ("Rich. de S. Germ.," p. 978). One of the Provençal troubadours, Pierre Vidal, when in Italy, echoed the public sentiment, stigmatising the Germans as enemies of the nation. This was in 1195, just when, for the first time after the treaty of Constance, Lombardy was rising against the emperor. "The Milanese," said he, "have come into power and glory; I only wish they would make peace with the people of Pavia, and that Lombardy would be on her guard against those coarse, wicked rascals (the Germans). Lombards, remember the murdered barons, the women given up to camp followers, and know that it will be still worse with you." And again, returning to the Germans, the poet thus describes them: "They are rustic and disagreeable, and if they attempt to be courteous they only disgust and annoy one. I would not be lord of Friesland if I had to pay the penalty of hearing their horrible language. It is like barking." It is curious that this song, though composed by a Frenchman, expresses so strong a sentiment of Italian nationality. S. Francis may very well have been acquainted with it, for that kind of composition was rapidly spread about the country.



stir within him. A great future, too, might be in store for him; he might make himself a name, and perhaps even be knighted at the hand of Brienne himself.

This idea was one especially likely to attract him. Chivalry, though its origin had been purely warlike and feudal, had little by little, been elevated and, in a measure, consecrated by religion. The ideal of the good and loyal knight, as it was then regarded, was, thanks to the teaching of the clergy, not far removed from the ideal of the perfect Christian. And, what was still more important, this ideal was not treated merely as a conception of the imagination having no connection with the will. In the imposing ceremony of his initiation, the newly made knight accepted it as a rule of life, and bound himself by the most solemn oaths never to lose sight of it. Thus he became the sworn representative of honour and disinterested virtue amongst men.<sup>1</sup> The poets, too, who readily take up all things noble, had their share in the institution. Through them, by means of their songs of *geste*, the ideal perfect knight had taken substance and received a name. Charlemagne's paladins and the companions of King Arthur, had become the well-known and admired types of chivalric heroism. Francis seems, especially in his youth, to have been much alive to the events of the day, and the importance of chivalry, in both its social and its religious aspect, could not have escaped him. He had, moreover, read epic poems, amongst others, as we shall see, that of the Round Table, in which the life of chivalry attains to the highest point of elevation; therefore we can readily understand what must have passed through his mind when he saw a possibility of his being admitted into the ranks of chivalry.

He hastened to the nobleman who was about to start, and begged for the honour of being allowed to follow him, most likely in the quality of squire. His request was

<sup>1</sup> "In the series of oaths and obligations imposed on the knights, there is a moral development far beyond that of the lay society of the period. Such elevated, delicate, scrupulous, humane notions proceeded evidently from the Christian clergy."—Guizot, "History of France," vol. i. page 311.



granted, and he lost no time in procuring a horse and having a rich costume prepared according to his taste, which, his biographers tell us, outshone that of the nobleman himself. Dressed in this, he was walking about, full of thoughts on his new profession, when he met a knight, who had fallen into such poverty that he was clothed in ragged garments. Without a moment's hesitation, half moved by a dawning sentiment of military confraternity, half by respectful pity for one who was in such misfortune, Francis stripped off the rich clothes that he had hardly worn, and presented them to the poor man. Doubly meritorious charity, considering the time at which Francis performed the act, remarks S. Bonaventura. He was rewarded, his historians say, by a prophetic dream on the following night. During his sleep, he thought he heard himself called by name, and he looked and saw a vast and magnificent palace filled with weapons. The walls were hung with shields marked with a cross, and with trophies of arms, and in a richly decorated room Francis perceived a lady of dazzling beauty attired as a bride. Astonished at the sight, he was wondering what it all meant, when he heard again the voice which had first called him, and it said, "They are for thee and for thy knights." Then he awoke, marvelling at what he had seen, and filled with ideas of grandeur. Heaven, he thought, had confirmed his new vocation. God had undertaken to lead him by the hand; he would go from one success to another. In his inexperience of the divine ways, he supposed these ideas to be well founded, and he could hardly restrain his joy. In the morning he appeared with such a radiant countenance, that his parents and friends asked him what was the cause of his unusual contentment, and he answered, in an exulting tone, "I have the certainty of becoming a great prince."

In this state of mind, and without having encountered any objection from his family, at the appointed time Francis mounted his horse, and with his page's buckler on his arm, set out on the road to Apulia. But his journey was not

long. At Spoleto, not more than ten leagues from Assisi, he was seized with an attack of fever, and forced to take to his bed. This disappointment at first annoyed him greatly. He thought he had been impelled on his course by God, and he was far from supposing that it was His providence which now stopped him from pursuing his way. He learnt it by another revelation. At night the mysterious voice that spoke to him at Assisi was heard again, saying, "Francis, who could benefit thee most, the master or the servant, the rich man or the poor?" "The master and the rich man," said Francis. "Then," replied the voice, "why dost thou leave God, who is the master and rich, for man, who is a servant and poor?" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" replied Francis, as prompt as was S. Paul to give himself up to the truth. "Return to thy native town; there it shall be told thee what thou must do. Thou wert wrong in giving a human interpretation to the vision of the palace. The vision will be accomplished, but by me, not by men." We can imagine how great was the effect of this second dream upon this young man, with his aspirations for a brilliant future. As the first, by its apparent answer to his thoughts, had so elated him that he was beside himself with joy, so the second, by arresting him in his course, obliged him to turn his thoughts inwardly and concentrate his forces within. He spent the remainder of the night anxiously seeking to know what he ought to do. Had God indeed spoken to him, and did the divine will require him to renounce all his hopes? What unknown career was before him, and how should he explain this sudden change to those who had seen him set out with such eagerness? He could not give a satisfactory answer to all these questions; but the more he reflected on the words he had heard, the more inclined he was to attribute a divine origin to them, and the more sensible he became to their irresistible force. He felt that he must obey them, at all costs, and in spite of any judgment that might be passed on his conduct; and having once taken the resolution, he acted upon it with

his habitual decision. The next morning he left his companions, to their great astonishment, and returned at once on the way to Assisi. As he proceeded, he felt more and more strengthened in the conviction that in all this there was a design of the divine goodness, and he experienced the pure joy of a duty fulfilled and a sacrifice willingly accepted.

His unexpected return must have been talked of in Assisi, but he was so greatly beloved that no one blamed him, or even inquired much about the motives that had guided him. The gay company of his friends, however, did something more. Delighted to have him amongst them again, they came, a few days after his arrival, to beg him to preside at one of their feasts, and to take the management of it, as he had often done before. In his heart Francis had no longer any taste for these amusements; late events had lifted him to a stage of higher ideas; but, with his natural good nature, he could not appear uncivil to what was intended as a compliment, and he accepted the invitation. As though he had a presentiment that this would be the last time that he would take part in such pleasures, he desired to do everything with more than usual generosity. He bore all the expenses of the festival, and it was a very grand one; the banquet that terminated it was especially abundant and elaborate. One of the historians of the Saint does not forget to mention that some of the guests exceeded the bounds of temperance. We can imagine that the sight of these excesses made a painful impression on Francis, and it probably contributed to the circumstance that was to render this day for ever memorable to him. When the feast was over, the guests, according to their custom, went through the town singing, Francis walking behind them, carrying in his hand a rod, as king of the festival. They had not gone far when Francis suddenly stopped. A bright light illuminated him within, and showed him the emptiness of the pleasures and interests of this world with extraordinary vividness. He felt himself seized with pity

and disgust for all that most men were labouring and striving for so earnestly, and at the same time a sweet and ineffable charm seemed to carry him out of himself. His historians tell us that it was God who then visited him, the Divine Friend of man, who, revealing His infinite beauty, filled his soul with unspeakable joy and peace. Absorbed in this hitherto unknown happiness, Francis no longer saw or heard. He stood speechless and motionless; they might have torn him in pieces, he said afterwards, and he would not have felt it, so completely was his soul enraptured. His companions, however, noticed that their king was not following them, and they retraced their steps to look for him. They found him in this strange state, and could not believe it was he. "What is the matter?" they said. "Why have you left us?" And one of them, bolder than the rest, thinking he had discovered his secret, said, "Ah! you are in love! you are going to marry." "You are right," said Francis, "and the woman I am going to wed is the noblest, richest, most beautiful that you have ever seen." This answer amused them, but Francis had thereby expressed his most intimate thoughts. He saw before him a life, undefined indeed as yet, but chosen for him by God, a life of self-denial and religion; he had at once embraced the ideal of perfection, and made it, in the language of the day, *the lady of his thoughts*, and he would have no rest until he had wedded her with tears and joy.

The great crisis had come to Francis. The celestial light that had given the shock or stirring of his reason, to which we referred at the beginning of this chapter, was continually present with him. Not that he broke off with the world at that moment. He seems to have remained in it as before, attending to his business more seriously than he had done for some years. But it was so only in appearance; ideas of virtue and perfection were every day gaining ground in his mind, and an attentive observer could trace their progress by more than one indication.

The first of these signs was a more ardent inclination for



prayer. God had revealed Himself to him, and he began to walk in His presence. A cold, passing thought for Him who had shown him His goodness did not satisfy him : he felt the strong desire of loving in return, of adoring and giving thanks. Often, almost daily, he was seen to withdraw from the tumult of affairs, or escape furtively from public places to find some altar or retired spot. There, alone with God, he poured out his soul in pious sentiments, or listened to the interior words that were spoken to him. These spiritual communings kindled within him a secret fire. The image of the Saviour became more real to his eyes ; he loved Him with a more intense love, and, according to S. Paul's expression, he desired to form, to hide Christ within himself.

That charity towards the poor, of which we have already seen the beginning in S. Francis, now increased and became more tender. He multiplied his alms, seeking out those who were in need, and making it a rule never to refuse them anything. When he had no more money left, he gave away whatever came to hand—a jewel, a garment, or a piece of cloth ; we are assured that he even gave away his own clothes, and that he would take off his linen if he saw one who required it, and would beg him to accept it for the love of God ; and more than all this, he gave himself, he gave his heart, to them. Once, in the absence of his father, he and his mother were at table together, and Francis had a quantity of bread brought in, as if for a large family. “ For whom are all these provisions ? ” said his mother. “ For the poor,” he answered. “ Do they not belong to us, and must we not give to all for God's sake ? ” And whenever a beggar came to the door, he got up as eagerly as he did formerly when called by his companions, and with kind words gave him from his own hand the relief he demanded. His pious mother, who loved him more than her other children, and whose love Francis seems to have tenderly returned, was full of admiration for him, and allowed him his way in all things. The closer she observed

his conduct, the more it filled her with joy and hope.

Illuminated by the Divine Light, the horizon of Francis widened daily. It was at this time that he began to concern himself about the clergy and their work. He who was destined himself to receive a mission from on high, was struck with the importance of the vocation and ministry of priests. It seemed to him impossible to give too much respect to those whose office it is to be co-operators with God, and dispensers of the mysteries and benefits of Jesus Christ, if only they acquitted themselves conscientiously of their high function. His active liberal nature was not content with merely showing this respect to the humblest member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, he wished to assist the priests who served in parishes that were without means. He privately sent them linen, ornaments, and all things necessary for their churches. His religious feeling made him realise that one of the greatest sufferings of poverty must be the inability to offer to God such gifts as we desire to offer, and he thought that to relieve this suffering was the holiest kind of almsgiving, and one to be exercised before all others. He rightly judged that in so doing he shared in the adoration that the poor brought to our Lord.

In acting thus, Francis was aware that he was at the threshold of a new life, but what was to be the exact nature of that life, as yet he knew not, he was only more convinced each day that it would be a life of voluntary poverty. In many ways, the idea of poverty, willingly embraced for God's sake, had great attractions for him, for he loved the generosity there was in such a course ; but on the other hand, there was so much in it entirely at variance with his worldly tastes, that he could not but look upon it as repulsive. He knew that he must endure many a struggle before he could form the union with poverty to which he felt himself called, and he was not sure that he had strength for this hard battle. An idea suddenly came to him to make a trial of it. For

this purpose, he said to himself, he had only to go to some town where he was entirely unknown. There, away from all his acquaintances, he would, as it were, meet poverty in the lists, and see how he could bear her rude onslaught. In this design we see an instance of his habit of mind in its familiarity with the usages of chivalry,<sup>1</sup> and a proof of his determined nature. He fixed upon Rome as the place in which to carry out his intention. There he had neither friends nor relatives, and a journey thither had besides the attraction of a pilgrimage. His father and mother regarded it in that light, and he set out with their consent, richly dressed as usual. Immediately on his arrival he went to the Shrine of S. Peter. It was crowded with pilgrims. Francis, while performing his devotions there, remarked that the offerings of the pilgrims were very small, and he was shocked, feeling it to be want of faith that made people slow in paying greater honour to the tomb of the chief of the apostles. Opening his purse, he took out a handful of coins and threw them inside the bars that enclosed the altar. The noise they made in falling drew the attention of the bystanders, and they asked who was this young man who was throwing money about so liberally. But Francis had moved away. He was in haste to accomplish the real purpose for which he had come. As he went down the steps of the church, he beckoned to one of the beggars who thronged them, and led him to a retired spot. There they exchanged clothes, and Francis, wearing the rags of the mendicant, went back and mingled with the crowd of beggars on the steps of S. Peter's, and remained there till evening, begging in the French tongue. To make the trial more complete, he joined his new companions in eating the wretched food they had received from public charity, and not till after all this was done did he resume his ordinary clothes. Now he had measured his strength. "He had hardened himself against the soft, cowardly delicacy of the world, which

<sup>1</sup> It was a common custom for young knights to go, with their shield covered and their vizor closed, to try their strength in some distant tournament.

cannot bear reproaches, though they have been consecrated in the person of the Son of God,"<sup>1</sup>

On his return to Assisi, he spoke to God only of what he had done. His biographers remark that he had no other confidant of his thoughts. Like all profound minds in which a great interior work is going on, he did not easily expand. Moreover, there was no one to whom he could give his confidence. Once or twice he had been to the Bishop of Assisi, who had received him kindly, but in general he met with no one who had the true love for poverty in which he intended to live and die. So he poured out his heart at the foot of the altar. As he had received the vocation to the life he was entering on direct from God, without any human medium, so he continued to ask from Him alone direction and progress in that life.

After his journey to Rome, he seems to have been more than ever earnest in requesting this. He entreated God with tears to make him know how to employ the strength that he had proved to himself that he possessed. But God's thoughts are seldom those of men. His plan is often to give a long trial to those whose field of action is to be a wide one. For answer, our Saint heard only these words: "Francis, if thou wilt know My will, thou must despise all that hitherto thou hast loved in this world. The more thou dost advance in so doing, the bitterer will become all that till now has seemed sweet to thee, but in return thou wilt find great delight in what heretofore was unbearable."

A short time after this invitation to attain to greater light by a more complete self-abnegation, Francis was taking a ride in the valley. His thoughts, at first unconnected and wandering, soon came back into their habitual channel: he was thinking of the obligation of self-conquest, when suddenly he saw, a little way in front of him, a leper, who, at his approach, held out his hand to him. Francis had an instinctive horror of lepers, he had always turned away whenever he had seen them coming, and sometimes even,

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, Panegyric of S. Francis of Assisi.



like those worldly people who pretend to be more delicate than they really are, he had affected an exaggerated repugnance, and in passing lazar houses he used to hold his nose ostentatiously, as if he were unable to endure the odours that might reach him. Now the usual feeling of disgust seized him ; his first impulse was to turn back, but remembering that his Lord had just required of him to continue to do violence to himself, he summoned all his resolution, and rode up to the unfortunate creature ; then he dismounted to give him his alms, and even had the courage to kiss the dreadful hand into which he placed it. After this he departed quickly, and looking back to see the leper once more, to his great astonishment he saw no one, although the plain was open. This first victory, though dearly bought, did not seem to him decisive. He found that he had not been completely master of himself, and felt that it was his duty to overcome himself still more. For this purpose, he resolved to repeat the trial, and to increase it in such a way as to entirely conquer his instincts. He went to the lazar-house, carrying with him a large sum of money, called together all the lepers, and gave an alms to each one, at the same time kissing them on the hand and cheek. The triumph over himself was now complete. As he went back to Assisi, Francis was full of happiness, he began to feel that his Lord's promises had not been vain. At the end of his life, when he was casting a backward glance over the ways by which he had been led, he dwelt upon this day with special satisfaction. "The Lord," said he in his testament, "gave me, Brother Francis, the grace to begin thus to enter on a life of penance : when I was in a state of sin, it was very bitter to me to behold lepers, but the Lord Himself having led me amongst them, I exercised mercy towards them, and when I left them I felt that what had seemed so bitter to me was changed into sweetness for my soul and body."

All the biographers of S. Francis agree in dating his definite conversion from this act. From that moment, they

say, he was another man, and the life of the Saint began. As with the early Christians in many instances, so with Francis, this dawn of the new life opened on him with an overpowering and joyful realisation of the Divine gift, or, in the words of the Gospel, of the Divine Kingdom which was offered to him. "The kingdom of heaven," said our Lord, "is like to a merchant seeking good pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Francis felt that he was the fortunate merchant spoken of in the parable. A watchful Providence, through many years, seemed to have been leading him on to give up everything, that he might gain all things; he had sacrificed nearly everything that he loved, and now he was being filled by Him whose generosity far surpasses that of His creatures. God was making His Presence felt by him, and speaking to his inmost soul, "I am thy salvation." It would be difficult to express the happiness with which Francis received that assurance. To be in communion with God, to know that he was guided, loved by Him, this was indeed the incomparable treasure, the pearl of great price, for which he could willingly abandon all things besides.

Notwithstanding his reserved character, of which we have spoken,\* his thoughts sometimes overflowed into words. Amongst the young men of his own age was one, whose name we do not learn, whom he had always loved more than any of the others. Francis could not make him entirely the confidant of his feelings—he never expressed them, except in a veiled form—but he took him as a companion in his walks, and, to a certain extent, made him a witness of his joy. He often went with him beyond the town, and when they were out of sight of men, he would, with a smiling countenance, say to him that he had found a treasure. "Where?" asked his friend, full of curiosity and interest. Francis then took him to a grotto he had discovered in the mountain: "It is here," he said, "but I must go in alone." And he entered and remained there for some time. His friend waited for

him outside, and when he returned, he saw that he was pale and exhausted, as though he had been at some labour beyond his strength. His labour was truly great. He did not dig in the earth, as his friend may have supposed, but his soul was tossed to its depths by a flood of conflicting emotions that both charmed and exhausted him. Recollections of the past besieged him, and he wept over the lost time and the profane amusements of his youth. Or the love that God was forming within him took possession of him, and he experienced its sweetness and sadness, saying with those who have been led to find the better way: too late have I known thee, thou beauty ever ancient and ever new! Oftener still his thoughts turned to the future, and he entreated God to remove the veil that hid it from him. All his faculties gained strength at this crisis; it is here that we must seek the origin of the fervour, earnestness, and enthusiasm which are as much his characteristics amongst the saints as is his love of poverty.

But the human heart is full of intricacies, and the carnal nature was not yet quite dead in Francis, as we learn from a curious circumstance that is told of him. There was a certain old woman at Assisi who was horribly deformed, and, it may have been after some days of fever and suffering, the idea took hold of him that if he persevered in a life of mortification, he would become like her. The thought of it was agonising, and the devil, who loves to work by means of vague terrors, increased the agony by his action. For some time the old woman appeared as a kind of phantom to Francis, pursuing him everywhere. He got rid of this temptation, for it was one, by commending himself to God, body and soul. He was ready to accept everything, even ugliness and deformity, if the Almighty required the sacrifice from him, and this humble disposition brought back peace to his soul. The trouble he had felt was only on the surface; God was continually drawing him, and his virtue, far from being in danger, was being fortified. We said that after his return from Spoleto, when he began to pray in solitude, the

image of our Saviour had begun to fix itself in his mind. During his long and frequent meditations in the grotto, this adorable image came before him with increasing force. He passed long hours in the charm of contemplation ; he was gained to Christ for ever. The sight of our Lord in His sufferings wounded him to the heart ; he seemed to be assisting at the Passion ; he saw Him stretched as a victim on the wood of the cross ; and he knew that it was love that made his Lord sacrifice the life that love had made him take. Now he understood the full meaning of the word Redeemer, and he repeated it with tenderness and gratitude. Jesus Christ Himself rewarded him. One day, when his fervour had been greater than usual, and he was quite absorbed in God, the Divine Saviour appeared to him as He was in His Passion. At the sight, Francis was moved in his whole being ; he gazed in love and trembling on the sad and gentle features of the august countenance which offered itself to his sight, and so strongly was the vision impressed upon him, that he could never afterwards think of the Passion without an inclination to burst into sobs and tears, and at times he did so. He was met near the Portiuncula once uttering cries of grief. "What is the matter?" they asked him, thinking he was taken with some misfortune. "I am weeping," he said, "for the Passion of my Lord Jesus, for which we ought to weep through the whole world." He bore the stigmata of the Saviour for two years in his body, but all his life, say his historians, he bore those sacred stigmata in his soul.

But the time for action and definite revelations was approaching. Francis felt it instinctively, and perhaps God may have let him see dimly, somewhat of the future that was before him. He experienced a kind of excitement like that felt by a brave warrior just before the signal for battle is given, and his eyes sparkled with more than their usual fire. He remembered his old dreams of glory, and sacrificed them openly to his present ideas. "No," he said, "I shall not go to Apulia, or be knighted. I



shall remain here in my native land and do great and noble deeds." The prediction was to be verified, though not so quickly as he seemed to think. God was going to let him purchase the glory He had in store for him by the years of obscurity and suffering we are about to record.

## CHAPTER III.

### HIS VOCATION, 1207-1209.

JUST below Assisi, on the eastern slope of the mountain on which the town is built, there was an ancient church dedicated to the martyr S. Damian. It was much dilapidated, and threatened to fall into complete ruins, though it was still used for worship and there was a priest attached to its service. Francis seldom went there, but one day, in passing by it to go down into the valley, as he often did, a sudden impulse induced him to enter. Obeying his growing sentiments of devotion, he went and prostrated himself before a Byzantine painting which he saw, representing our Lord upon the cross. As he prayed, he gazed upon it with tearful eyes, and a voice that seemed to come from the sacred image repeated these words in his ear: "Francis, dost thou not see how my house is falling to ruin? Go, and set thyself to repair it." Three times the miraculous injunction was repeated. Francis, alone in the church, trembled all over as he heard it, and answered: "Most willingly, O Lord," hardly knowing what he said. It was not till after some little time that he came to himself and regained complete consciousness. God was at last appointing him a task, and how did he understand the commission? Did it not refer to that "work which He has accomplished in our midst, and which, being His alone, fills all time and space, the Church of Jesus Christ?" (Bossuet). His biographers have taken it in this sense. S. Bonaventura says that the Holy Spirit afterwards gave this interpretation to His servant, and he in turn made it known to his disciples. This is clear, but it is no less certain that, at the moment, Francis only thought of the ruinous edifice he had before his eyes,

and we think that he was in conformity with the Almighty's will by first occupying himself with that fact alone. When God reveals Himself to the children whom He loves, He does not oblige them to undertake work for which they are unfitted, and make mistakes which it would take years to remedy.

As soon as Francis had come to himself, he signed himself with the cross, and going out of the church, went to the chaplain's house, which was close by. He offered him a considerable sum of money, "Reverend Father," he said, "I pray you buy oil with this money, and keep a lamp always burning before the crucifix in your church. When this is spent, I will give you more money as you require it." On his way back to Assisi, he turned over in his mind how he could fulfil the mission that had been intrusted to him. He soon came to a decision. When he reached his father's house, he made up a packet of rich stuffs of various colours, mounted his horse, and rode to Foligno, where he quickly sold everything, the horse as well as the wares. With the money he had received, he returned on foot to the church of S. Damian, feeling the satisfaction of a merchant who has made a good bargain. There he went at once to the priest, kissed his hand respectfully, and presented him with the product of the sale he had just made, explaining the object to which he desired to consecrate it, and begging besides, to be allowed to stay with him and begin the work at once. The priest could hardly believe his ears. Could it be that Francis, whom he had lately seen in the midst of every festival, out-doing everyone in foolish expenditure, who now wished to work for God, and to share his humble dwelling? He thought he was being made the subject of some bad joke, but Francis insisted, assuring him that he was quite serious in his request, and entreating him in God's name not to refuse him. The humble priest partly gave in; he consented to let him stay with him, but refused decidedly to receive the money, unless his family approved of his spending so large a sum. Francis, in disappointment at

this decision, flung away the purse containing the money, as if it were of no value, upon the ledge of one of the windows of the little sanctuary, and then came back quietly to his host.

His parents, finding he did not come home, became anxious. His father especially, who began to suspect the truth, was much disturbed in mind. He wondered where his son could be, and went all over the town to hear news of him. After much trouble, at the end of some days, he learned that Francis was at S. Damian, living with the chaplain of the church. Pietro was greatly troubled. This was what he had feared; the religious excitement he thought he had perceived in Francis for some time past had now taken possession of his mind; he had lost his son, and he must renounce all the hopes he had founded on him. He resolved to make one great attempt to prevent this misfortune, if it were not already too late. Having come originally from a distant province, he had no relatives in Assisi, but he had a large circle of friends. He called in their assistance, and a party of them accompanied him to S. Damian. They were in hopes that the fugitive would be won by their remonstrances, and would consent to return with them to Assisi. But Francis did not wait for their assault. He would have stood his ground on a battlefield, but he was not yet trained for these battles in the cause of God. As he saw them coming, and heard the sound of their voices raised in animated discourse, he escaped, and hid himself in a cavern he knew of, probably the one where we have seen him meditating on the sufferings of his Lord. There he remained for a whole month, shut up, as it were, in a close prison, and only receiving food from one of his father's servants who was in the secret. But if his body suffered, his mind did so still more. For the first time in his life he had met with contradiction, and had been subjected to men's unjust judgment. It was a hard trial, and he only surmounted it by prayer. Prostrate before God, and shedding torrents of tears, he confessed his nothingness and im-



potence. He humbly entreated God's aid to deliver him from those who were pursuing him, and, above all, to enable him to accomplish all that He required of him. God did not turn a deaf ear to the voice of His servant. He fortified his heart and raised his courage, saying to him what He has ever said to His messengers: "I will be with thee, fear not." Francis, thus encouraged, became like the soldier, who, reproaching himself for a moment of weakness, returns with redoubled energy to the combat; he came out of the cavern, and with quick, decided steps, cheerfully took the road to his father's house.

His arrival created a sensation in the town, where his father had published his grievances and complaints. When they saw Francis coming in, emaciated with fasting, his eyes red with weeping, and his clothes in disorder, they collected about him and murmured reproaches. "He is mad," they said, and those who had known him best were the first to upbraid him; others cast stones and mud at him. But he walked on quietly, deaf to their clamour, and in his heart giving thanks to Him who was making him the sharer in His own sufferings. This tranquil demeanour only irritated the mob, and they redoubled their insults. The tumult reached the ears of Pietro Bernardone, and when he saw the state into which his beloved son had fallen, and heard the shouts of indignation of the townspeople against him who had hitherto been their idol, his anger burst forth, and he "rushed upon Francis like a wolf on a lamb," and losing all self-control, laid hands on him, and dragged him into the house, where he bound him and threw him into a sort of dungeon. Through the succeeding days he besieged him, sometimes with threats, sometimes with soft words, making every effort to induce him to give up these extravagances, as he called them, and to return to his ordinary kind of life. But the prisoner remained steadfast; his only answer to all that was proposed to him was that he had received a command from God, and he would execute it at all costs. Bernardone, finding he could get nothing from him, left him

in prison while he went away for some weeks on commercial affairs.

The mother of Francis now tried her influence on him. She had never approved of her husband's violence, and she hoped that her maternal caresses would have a greater effect upon him. She did not know that upright hearts never can resist God long. Forty years later, in the castle of Rocca Secca in this same Italy, the sisters of the young Count of Aquino tried in the same way to bring back to the world their brother, who, like Francis, had started eagerly upon a life of religion. Instead of persuading him, it was he who persuaded them; the powerful words of the future Doctor of the Church soon convinced them that to consecrate oneself to the service of God is the most honourable thing upon earth. Something of the same kind took place at Assisi. The good mother, instead of prevailing with her son, submitted to his influence. When she had heard him relate the secret of his change, and saw how sincerely his heart was given up to the love of God, she not only left off trying to alter him, but was filled with a holy respect for him. It seemed to her that it would be wrong in a father and mother to oppose those sacred impulses, and though aware of the responsibility she incurred, she unbound her son and left him at liberty to follow the path to which his Lord called him. Francis, having thanked her, went down at once to the little church where lay his thoughts and his duty.

When Pietro Bernardone came home and found his prisoner was gone, he "added sin to sin," and poured out reproaches on his wife; then he hurried to S. Damian. He would bring back his son, he said, or he would have him sent out of the country. But Francis had become stronger by the contest; he now met his father boldly, and told him calmly that he feared neither blows nor chains, that indeed he would suffer willingly for Jesus Christ, and that nothing could prevent him from devoting himself to the sacred mission that had been entrusted to him. The father was struck by the calmness with which his son spoke, and he saw

that he would not give way, therefore he merely replied coldly that that sort of mission, if it were a mission, could not be accomplished with stolen money. The purse containing the product of the sale at Foligno was still lying in the dust on the ledge of one of the windows of the church. Francis showed it to his father, saying that if he wanted it it he could take it away. And this he did. When we consider the extravagant style of living in which Francis had indulged with the connivance of his parents, we hardly think this act was dictated by the avarice of a man delighted at finding the money he had supposed to be lost. The truth is probably that Pietro Bernardone, at the end of his resources, suddenly thought of this method, and hoped he might, as it were, take the rebel by famine. And we are confirmed in this assumption, when we find that, carrying out his plan, Bernardone, on his return to Assisi, went straight to the palace of the commune and lodged an information with the consuls to get back all the money that his son had carried away from his house, and to oblige Francis to renounce in legal form all his rights of inheritance. The magistrates were shocked at such extreme measures, and seem to have remonstrated with the unfortunate father who was in such strange affliction; but as he insisted on his claims, they summoned Francis by a herald to appear at their tribunal. But he, without being disturbed, answered the messenger that, thanks to heaven, he had entered into the liberty of the children of God, and that he was no longer under the jurisdiction of the consuls. They, being unwilling to use violent measures, said to the father: "Since he has entered into God's service, he is right, and we have nothing to do with his actions." Thereupon Bernardone carried his complaint to the Bishop.

The Bishop at that time was named Vido, or Guido, and was the second of the name. He was a man of great good sense and wisdom. He cited Francis in the most courteous terms. "Yes," he answered, "I will go before the Lord Bishop, who is the father and master of souls." On the

appointed day he appeared with his father. "My son," said the Bishop kindly, "thy father is greatly incensed against thee. If thou desirest to consecrate thyself to God, restore to him all that was his. It may be that thou hast no right to it, and moreover God will not have thee employ in re-building his church, money that is an occasion of sin to thy father. For thyself, fear nothing, be strong, and have confidence. God will help thee, and will not let thee want any of those things that are necessary for His work." Encouraged by those words, Francis rose and said: "My lord, I will give back everything to my father, even the clothes that I have had from him." And, filled with a divine impulse, he went into a neighbouring room and divested himself of his clothes; then, carrying them in his hands, he returned, clad in nothing but a horse-hair shirt. "Hear me," he said, "and understand, up to this date I have called Pietro Bernardone father, henceforth I will say in all truth, 'Our Father who art in heaven, in whom I have put my hopes and my treasure;'" at the same time he laid his clothes and all the money he had about him at the Bishop's feet. There was a moment of astonished silence, then Bernardone, determined to carry matters to extremity, picked up the clothes and the money and went away. The bystanders were moved to tears, and there was a murmur of indignation when they saw the father depart without leaving his son so much as to cover his nakedness. The venerable Bishop looked tenderly on this young man who, for God's sake, had not hesitated to strip himself of his garments, as his Lord was stripped on the cross, and he drew him to his heart like a well-beloved son, throwing his own cloak over his shoulders.

Such was the scene of the separation of Francis from his family, that has become so justly famous in the annals of the Saints. Preceding events had gradually paved the way for it, and there is nothing in it that cannot easily be explained. Pietro Bernardone, who was easy and tolerant when things went according to his own will, could become



hard and obstinate if his will was crossed. He had dreamt of a splendid future for his son, and to this end had encouraged all his ambitious aspirations, and had grudged neither money nor the sacrifice of his commercial hopes as long as he thought Francis was on the road to greatness. But his son now, instead of the life of a prince, was taking up a miserable, beggarly life, leaving the world, and hiding himself in caves and priests' houses. Bernardone could not understand this change. He saw in it nothing but folly that he ought to put a stop to, and, with his violent nature, he thought to accomplish this by persecuting and driving to extremities that proud, delicate nature, which would only have given in to kindness, if it could have given in at all. On the other hand, Francis, illuminated with the light God was shedding upon him, remained convinced that his present mode of life was the only right one: he thought it the greatest honour and glory to offer himself to God as His servant. If he reflected upon his past youth, that time seemed to him like a time of blindness, when his idea of glory was the pursuit of a trifle and a nothing. Then his father was full of kindness and generosity to him. Why should he persecute him now, and so passionately reclaim money that he had formerly lavished upon him? Was there not a sort of impiety in this change of conduct? The love his father had shown him up to this time could have been only a selfish, irregular love after all. With such feelings on both sides, a crisis was inevitable, and it took place in the solemn way we have related, leaving traces which seem never to have been effaced.

When Pietro Bernardone had departed, the Bishop of Assisi sent for a garment for Francis. They could find nothing except an old peasant's mantle belonging to one of the servants. Francis gladly put it on, and as he left the palace, he traced a large cross upon the cloak with some mortar that was lying in the courtyard. That, says S. Bonaventura, was a garment suited to a poor, crucified man. After such great emotion, Francis did not wish to return at once to S.

Damian. He wished to collect himself and come to a calm consideration of his condition. By spending a few days in solitude, he could better enjoy the liberty he had gained, and away from the noise of the world could hear in silence the voice of Him who was leading him on his way. The winter of 1207 was nearly at an end, nature was beginning to show signs of renewed life, the first flowers had already made their appearance. Francis penetrated into the great woods that surrounded Assisi. He was filled with a sort of spiritual intoxication, and sang the praises of God aloud in the French tongue. His singing attracted some robbers hidden in the neighbouring thickets. They rushed upon him and asked him who he was. He looked at them, and answered in the language of chivalry that he so often employed: "I am the herald of the Great King, but what concern is it of yours?" They took him for a madman, and after they had made game of him, they threw him into a deep ditch where still lay a quantity of snow, saying: "Well, go in there, you poor herald of the Good God." When they were gone, he came out of the ditch, though not without some difficulty in struggling through the snow, and, happy at having suffered for God's sake, he went on his way singing louder than before.

In his wanderings he reached a monastery amongst the mountains, and asked for hospitality. They received him, but only to employ him in the kitchen as assistant, and to do the heavy work. At the same time, they hardly gave him the commonest food, and though his clothes were in rags, no one seemed to think of giving him even an old worn-out garment to replace them. So he was obliged to leave them, and this he did without any ill-will. At Gubbio, which is not very far off, he had a friend of his old worldly days. To him he went and told him of the extremity to which he was reduced. The friend, doubtless at his desire and to suit his taste, gave him a short tunic, a leather belt, shoes, and a stick. It was very much the same costume as that worn by the ancient hermits. Francis wore it for two years.

From Gubbio he went back to his beloved church of S. Damian, and on the way thither he turned into a lazaret-house. Lepers seem to have been as numerous in Europe in the Middle Ages as they were in Palestine when our Lord was there. On account of the contagious nature of their malady, they were everywhere placed outside the towns in special hospitals, isolated from their fellow-creatures. The Church, whose mission it is to care for all the children of her Lord, had provided the means of life and hope for these poor creatures. Since they could not be in the world themselves, she sent them the best thing there is in it, devoted and charitable hearts. Besides Bishops specially appointed by Councils to the care of them, they could reckon amongst their visitors and friends such names as S. Louis, S. Elisabeth of Hungary, S. Catherine of Siena, to mention only some of the most celebrated. Francis preceded all these. We have said how he had conquered his early antipathies; now he wished to do more than he had ever done before for these unfortunate beings. He stayed with them and became the tenderest and most attentive of nurses. He went from one to another, washed their feet, and bound up their wounds after having carefully cleansed them. Sometimes he would even perform these offices on his knees. God crowned this perfect charity by showing His power through its means. Francis was often able to cure the sick whom he tended. S. Bonaventura gives an instance of this, and though it refers to a later period of his life, we will quote it here. There was a man at Spoleto whose cheeks and mouth were eaten away by cancer. He had been to Rome to pray for deliverance from the terrible disease at the tomb of the holy Apostles, and he was returning without having procured it, when he met Francis on his road. He was about to throw himself at his feet, but the humble servant of God lifted him up and embraced him tenderly. The contact of those holy lips instantaneously cured the poor sufferer. "I know not which most to admire," says S. Bonaventura, "the kiss

which proved such great humility, or the cure that proved such power."

But Francis seemed to hear constantly the voice from the crucifix calling him to S. Damian, and after a few days he quitted the lazar-house on the road from Gubbio, and went where his true vocation lay. Only a few weeks had passed since he had left the priest at the little sanctuary. Now when he returned to take his place with him again, he told him that the state of entire destitution into which he had fallen had not in any way altered his intentions, that he had come back to begin the restoration they had talked of, and that he had good reason for hoping to be able to accomplish it. Then he spoke of the encouragement the Bishop of Assisi had given him, and the prelate's assurance that the Almighty would come to his assistance. He set to work. Alms were his only resource, and he resorted to them. Every day he went to the public places in Assisi, and there, full of enthusiasm and fervour, he sang hymns to the Divine majesty and goodness. When people had collected around him at the sound of his voice, he explained to them that he had undertaken to reconstruct the church of S. Damian, and for that purpose he required stones, which he begged from the generosity of his fellow-townsmen. "He who gives me one," he added, "will have one recompense, he who gives me two will have two recompenses, he who gives me three will have three." The people could not get over their astonishment at what was to them so sudden a change in Francis. They all recalled the days, so lately past, when he seemed to delight in living like a great nobleman. "He is quite mad," said some, those no doubt who had already said this of him, and they derided him. But others began to see the principle by which his acts were inspired. Some were even moved to tears, perceiving how quickly he had passed from the vain excitement of the world into such rapture of Divine love. They brought him stones in quantities, and he, though his frame was far from robust, took the stones



on his back like a labourer, and carried them one by one to S. Damian. The priest, when he saw him thus working beyond his strength, did not know how sufficiently to show his admiration. In spite of his poverty, he tried to prepare for him the best food that he could, for he had heard that in the world Francis had been accustomed to good living.<sup>1</sup> Now the latter, one day becoming aware of these attentions, said to himself, "Canst thou always have with thee a priest like this one who is so courteous? Is this the life of a poor man that thou hast elected to follow? If thou wilt live like the poor, thou must go from door to door with a bowl in thy hand to receive the scraps which may be given thee. Thus shalt thou live by love for Him who was born poor, and lived very poor in the world, who remained poor and naked in His Passion, and was buried in a sepulchre belonging to another." Thereupon, one day, he took a wooden bowl and went through the town asking for charity from door to door. The astonishment of many was great to see him, whom they had known as so refined, thus changed and careless of opinion. But when he tried to eat the rations he had collected, he turned against them, he had never even looked at such disgusting food, much less eaten it. Finally, with a great effort, he tasted it, and it seemed as though no well-prepared dish had ever been so savoury. He was greatly cheered, because, though his flesh was weak and suffering, God had permitted him to be comforted by things that were hard and bitter. In consequence of this, he told the good priest that he would not have to provide or prepare any more food for him in the future.

When Pietro Bernardone found that the son for whom he had done so much had taken up the life of a mendicant, his exasperation reached its height. He could not bear the idea of such degradation, and if by chance he met Francis

<sup>1</sup> Francis always had a weak stomach. He was not a gourmand, but at that time he was somewhat dainty; he liked well-cooked dishes, and sweets, *electuaries*, as the Three Companions say. Later on, he frequently accused himself of this.—"Tres. Soc.," page 32.

in the streets, he blushed with shame, and, with the anger that accompanies wounded self-esteem, he often cursed him. These maledictions were inexpressibly painful to Francis. He had no rest till he had hit upon a method for counter-acting the painful impression he could not help experiencing from them in his mind. He went to a certain poor old man, the most wretched and friendless of any in Assisi. His name was Albert. "Come with me," said Francis, "and thou shalt share with me the alms that I receive. When my father Bernardone curses me I shall say to thee, 'Bless me, my father'; and thou shalt make the sign of the cross upon me." The beggar did so, doubtless feeling honoured at the part Francis had given him to play, and the latter said to Pietro Bernardone, "You see that God can give me a father from whom I receive blessings, while you only curse me."

One of his brothers, Angelo by name, the only one we hear mention of in his history, was not more charitable towards him than his father was. One winter's day he saw Francis shivering in a church in Assisi, clothed in his poor hermit's tunic, and he said spitefully to one of his friends, "Tell Francis to sell you a few sous worth of sweat." "Oh, I shall sell it to God much dearer than that," replied Francis in French. Sacred words, that coming thus spontaneously from his lips, show us on what foundation his soul rested, and what was the secret of his hopes. Notwithstanding the harsh resentment of his relatives, Francis found daily increasing sympathy amongst his compatriots. Help came in on all sides. He was soon in a condition to begin repairing the church, and he himself gave the greatest impulse to the work. He watched and presided over everything. He exhibited the joyous activity and eagerness of the bird that builds a nest for its young ones in the solitudes. He did indeed know by Divine inspiration, that this sanctuary would become a shelter and a place of prayer for noble souls that God would call to Himself, and this added to his enthusiasm. His historians represent him

mounted on the walls like an overseer of the work, and like a man inspired calling out to the passers by and to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in French, saying, "Come all of you, and help me in this work, for one day there will be here a monastery of holy women, whose renown will bring glory to the Heavenly Father throughout the Church."<sup>1</sup> Who can say that religion dries up the heart? Not one of those stones employed in the re-building of S. Damian but had been brought there through some act of tenderness and piety. Nearly fifty years later, S. Clare, as her life was ebbing away in this little nest that had been so affectionately prepared for her, and where her soul had been beautified and sanctified in retirement from the world, delighted to cheer her last days by recalling the details of this reconstruction, and lest these cherished memories should perish, she recorded them in her spiritual testament. "You must never forget," she wrote to her sisters, "what our Lord has deigned to do for us by one of His greatest servants, not only after our conversion, but even while we were still in the vanities of the world. He had but just renounced the world, and as yet had neither brethren nor companions, when, while repairing the ruins of S. Damian, and all filled with that Divine Spirit Who, visiting him with ineffable consolation, had led him to quit the world, he predicted things whose accomplishment we have begun to see. Standing on the walls of the ancient chapel, he called the poor of the place to him, and said with a loud voice: Come and help me, for in a short time there will be women here whose reputation and holy life will glorify our heavenly Father. Let us always bless the Infinite Goodness which deigned thus to announce beforehand the choice it had made of us."<sup>2</sup>

Under these auspices, the work of reconstruction made rapid progress. As the church rose from its ruins, Francis

<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable that S. Francis speaking French was understood by the inhabitants of this little place, a striking proof of the similarity there then was between the two languages.

<sup>2</sup> "Vita Sanctæ Claræ apud Bolland," tom. ii., Augusti.

felt more and more love to it. He had sacrificed so much for it. His rank in the world, his place at the paternal hearth, the affection which had formerly been bestowed on him; after God, it was for this church that he had given them all up. And on the other hand, it had perhaps given him more than he had expected. In its service he had learnt what it is to be faithful to a mission from on high, he had tasted the austere joy of unmerited suffering, and he had given a noble outlet to his activity and all his faculties. It had become to him a monument of the Divine blessings in the best period of his life, and he desired to have in it a lasting proof of his gratitude. After he had heard the voice from the crucifix, he had requested that a lamp should always burn before the sacred image. Now when the church was finished, he did not think one lamp sufficient, he wished to have several burning night and day. In realising this wish he experienced a hesitation that is perhaps unexampled by any instance of the same sort in his life. He began begging through the town for a supply of oil, that he might leave it with the server at the church for keeping the lamps alight. At length he came to a house where there was an entertainment going on, and numerous guests were present. For a moment the sight recalled his old feelings and instinct for elegance. He looked down at his poor garment, and felt ashamed to present himself in the midst of all that luxury and ceremony. He was going away without having been seen, when he began to reproach himself for this momentary weakness. He returned to the house, and standing before the assembly, simply confessed that the feast and their fine dresses had frightened him a little, adding that he feared that this timidity had not been altogether without sin, because he was working in God's name, and soliciting oil for the lamps in His sanctuary. His biographers affirm, what we can easily believe, that the brilliant assemblage took in good part a request which, if somewhat unseasonable, was condoned by the humility and grace with which it was proffered.



Francis, thinking it incumbent on him to continue the work he had begun, restored two more sanctuaries after that of S. Damian. His posterity and his historians have seen in this a secret purpose of the Almighty, and a foreshadowing of what was to come. God, who, they say, was leading him in everything, ordered things so that he repaired three churches before instituting the three Orders, in order that the material temples might be the figure of the three spiritual edifices of which he was to be the author. One of these two latter sanctuaries was a church at some distance from Assisi, consecrated to the prince of the Apostles, for whom Francis had a great devotion. The other, situated at the foot of the town, in the valley, was only a little chapel. This chapel was very ancient, and was consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. It had originally been called S. Mary of the Angels, on account of certain apparitions of celestial beings, but at the time of S. Francis this name had almost disappeared, and it was generally known as S. Mary of the Portiuncula. It is supposed to have received this name from the Benedictines of Monte Subasio, who had acquired it, with a narrow strip of land around it, some time previously. They no longer made use of the building, and it was falling into decay, and was frequented only by shepherds from the neighbourhood, who took shelter in it in bad weather. Francis, finding the chapel in this wretched condition, took pity on it and set himself to restore it. He soon became fonder of it even than of S. Damian. Its small size, the name and image of Mary, the silence which reigned about it, perhaps some presentiment of what God was then going to accomplish, all combined to make it dear to him. He built a cell beside it and became its constant inmate. There, during long months, he used to come by day and by night to pour out his soul in prayer. There, too, under the eyes and by the merits of her who conceived and brought forth the Word made flesh, he was to conceive of evangelical truth in all its fulness and perfection.

It was the 24th February 1209. The Church celebrated

on that day, as it still does, the feast of S. Matthias. Francis had desired to have the holy sacrifice offered in the little sanctuary, and probably he assisted alone at it. In the Gospel he was struck with the words he heard read by the officiating priest. "Do not possess gold nor silver, nor money in your purse, nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a staff."<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the Mass was finished, he asked the priest to explain these words to him, and hearing that they were those spoken by our Lord to His Apostles at the moment when He was sending them forth to preach His word to the world, he exclaimed, "Ah! that is what I have long been seeking for, that is what I have sought for in my prayers." And going quickly out of the church he threw away his purse, his shoes, and his stick, and put on the dress of the poorest peasants of the Appenines, the dark grey tunic with a cord for a girdle. He was filled with joy, now his vocation was made clear. He had found it definitely. He had at the same time sealed his union with holy Poverty, and, though as yet he knew it not, he had founded in his own person that great Order of Friars Minor, which rightly traces back its existence to this day.

Immediately, as though in putting on the apostolic livery he had become inspired with apostolic zeal, he began to preach. His discourses, or rather his colloquies, were simple without being vulgar or ridiculous. On the contrary, they were animated by the Spirit of God and penetrated to the inmost heart of men, so that his hearers were greatly impressed. He announced penitence, evangelical perfection, and above all, peace. "The peace of the Lord be with you," were the words with which he began and ended his exhortations—a happy inspiration, given him, as he said, from heaven. Peace, that peace within, the result of passions subdued and our lot in life accepted, is the great want of our souls. And in those stormy days of violence, when there was war everywhere, and its deadly effects were

<sup>1</sup> This Gospel is no longer read on S. Matthias' day.

visible on all sides, no one could speak of external peace, of union and concord, without being at once recognised as a messenger from God by the innumerable crowd of those who had suffered and wept. This, in a few words, was the secret of the marvellous force of S. Francis. It is said, that before him, a man in Assisi used to go through the streets of the town crying, "Peace and welfare! Peace and welfare!" He disappeared as soon as Francis began to be heard. He was only a precursor—the true preacher of peace had now indeed come. At his first accents, many changed their ways and turned to Him who is named the Prince of Peace; but his influence was to become much more powerful when a family of disciples should join him and carry the spirit of his teaching to the ends of the earth.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HIS FIRST COMPANIONS, 1209.

*UNLESS the grain of wheat falling into the ground, die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit* (S. John xii. 24).

The moment had come when these Divine words were to be accomplished for Francis. Truly he was dead to all that the world calls life; he had used violence, violence in the sense of the Gospel, to enable him to reject one by one all the goods and pleasures of this world. There was no longer any obstacle between God and him. "Had it not been for the thin wall of his flesh, he would have seen God face to face," says one of his historians. And now the fruition was to come that is promised to all virtue that attains to so high a degree. The ancients had suspected that "wisdom would excite incredible love if it could be perceived by the bodily eyes."<sup>1</sup> The Saints, after our Lord, are the truest manifestation of this celestial wisdom. What wonder, then, if their beauty moves us, and we are sensible of their irresistible attraction, or that men should seek for their society, and become their disciples on all sides. It was a simple heart, a child, according to Celano, who first attached himself to Francis. We know not what quality it was which drew him to the Saint. These childlike intuitions almost always escape analysis. Most probably he recognised in Francis the kindness of heart that was ever ready to show itself, and so he came to him. For some time he used to follow the Saint about, and seemed greatly to delight in his society. Then the historians make no further mention of him. Perhaps he died

<sup>1</sup> Plato, "Phædrus." Cf. Cicero: *Facies honesti, quæ si oculis videretur, mirabiles amores excitaret sapientiæ.*—"De officiis," lib. i. cap. v.



prematurely, perhaps the impression he had received was not a lasting one, and wore off in the course of time. The fact is, that he does not seem to have worn the Franciscan habit, and is rarely reckoned amongst one of the companions of S. Francis.

The honour of having been the first born of the Franciscan family is reserved for Bernard of Quintavalle. He was a rich citizen of Assisi, and in all respects a man of gravity and consideration. Only a few years older than Francis, he was one of those who had been the most impressed by his conversion. Ever since that moment, he had continued to keep him in sight, and the admiration he had felt in the beginning was raised to a height when he observed with what constancy and serenity the Saint bore all contradictions, and he now wished to see more of him, and to judge of him from personal experience. He several times offered him hospitality, and Francis appears to have accepted it willingly. Bernard made use of these occasions to try and penetrate the inmost thoughts of his guest. He prolonged his questionings into the night, and even had recourse to a somewhat questionable stratagem. According to a common custom in those days, they both slept in the same room. We are told that Bernard used to feign a profound slumber, hoping that Francis would reveal himself more freely if he supposed himself to be unobserved. On one of these occasions, he saw him rise suddenly and kneel down, raising his hands and eyes towards heaven, repeating slowly : "*Deus meus et omnia* : My God and my all." All the fervour of his soul passed into those simple words, and Bernard was completely won over by witnessing such sincere piety. "This is a man raised up by God," he said to himself. In a few days he had made up his mind ; he would sell all his goods and offer himself to Francis as a sharer of his life. He made his intentions known to the latter, and asked him to come to his house on an appointed evening, that they might confer together at their leisure. Francis gave thanks to God ; he recognised the Providence that had always watched over him, and, after two years of solitude and trial, had sent him

an excellent companion and needful friend. When the time came that they had fixed on, he went to Bernard. "If a servant," said the latter, "had received riches from his master, and after several years came to the conclusion that he ought not to keep them any longer, what would be the best thing for him to do?" "He should give back everything to his master," replied Francis. "I am that man," said Bernard, "therefore, if you think it right, I shall distribute all my goods to the poor for the love of God." "To-morrow," said Francis, who wished to be supported by higher authority than his own, "we will go into the church and seek in the Gospel for what Jesus Christ recommended to His disciples on this point."

Early the next morning they went to the church of S. Nicholas at Assisi with a third companion, named Peter, who, according to tradition, was a canon,<sup>1</sup> and desired to embrace the new life also. It seems that none of them, not even the canon, were familiar enough with Scripture to find for himself what our Lord had said about renouncing the world, so they prayed very simply to God to direct them in their search, and then Francis, kneeling before the altar, opened the book of the Gospels: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

These were the first words he lighted upon, and when, to make the trial more sure, he sought again, he came on the words: "Take nothing for your journey." Then he opened the book a third time in honour of the Holy Trinity, and read: "If any man will come after me let him deny himself."

They thanked God for having thus three times confirmed them in their resolutions, and Francis said to his companions: "My brothers, this shall be our life and our rule; and it shall be the life and the rule of those who in future will join our company."

<sup>1</sup> It is to be remarked that this canon was not a priest. All the historians of S. Francis agree in affirming that Sylvester, his twelfth companion, was the first priest of the Order.

On leaving the church, Bernard set to work to sell his numerous possessions, and Peter also endeavoured to get rid of the few things he possessed. They distributed the proceeds of these sales to the poor, and now, being poor men themselves, they returned to Francis in his poverty, and all three began their life in conformity with the precepts of perfection of the holy Gospel. It was the 16th April 1209. Bernard and Peter put on the costume of him whom they considered as their guide, and established themselves with him near S. Mary of the Portiuncula, where they constructed a poor hut to shelter themselves.

We know very little about Peter. One contemporary chronicler, Giordano di Giano, has it that he was learned, a master of arts, and even of noble family. This explains how, though he was but a simple clerk, or even a layman, he had been made a canon. The Chapter had admitted him that they might put their affairs and interests into good hands, and it was probably for the same reason that Francis thought of him when he chose a Vicar-General to take his place amongst the brethren.

Bernard of Quintavalle has received more notice from the historians. We will relate some anecdotes which will finish the portrait of his character.

He was always remarkable for great calmness and moderation, and after his conversion these qualities developed into the most perfect kindness of heart. He never could ill-judge anyone. If he met a beggar in rags, he would say : " There is one who is more faithful to poverty than I am." If he saw a man richly dressed, he said : " Perhaps he wears, or he will some day wear, horse-hair beneath his garments." And the same on all occasions. Like many who unite gentleness with intelligence, he was very successful in business matters, and was often employed for new Foundations of the Order. In these circumstances he never spared himself, but he knew how to work without excitement or dissipation of his energy. Brother Egidius said of him, " He is like the swallows who feed while they are flying ;

he is always about on the roads and on the mountains and in the valleys, and as he goes he is able to meditate and nourish himself with heavenly consolations. It is not everyone to whom this grace is given." The respect he inspired in all who approached him grew with his increasing years. Salimbene degli Adami, a witness of the second generation, tells us that the young brothers sought for his society. "I passed a winter at the convent of Siena with him," he says. "I loved him tenderly, and he was good enough to shew me some affection. He delighted to talk to us young people of the great things accomplished by the blessed Francis. I owe much to his conversation." Such was Bernard, the "Venerable Bernard," as he is called by S. Bonaventura, and afterwards by Dante who is almost always exact in matters of history. We may say, that he brought in his person the first homage which calm reason has rendered to the enthusiasm of Francis. A good answer may be found in him for those spirits in the present day who are scandalised at the effects of the love of God.

His conversion and that of Peter, made a great sensation in Assisi. It was the general subject of conversation. Eight days after the event, a young man named Egidius heard his father and mother talking about it the whole evening. They related in detail and with the greatest admiration all that the new friends of poverty had done, and Egidius, much impressed, began to think about his own salvation. The next morning he got up very early, and went to worship God in the church of S. George, whose festival it was on that day, 23rd April. He came out of the church quite determined to offer himself to Francis, but he did not know the exact place to which the new religious family had retired. Three roads led down to the valley. He took the first he came to, saying, "O Lord, give me a sign, that I may know if I should persevere in this holy vocation ; lead my steps towards Thy servants." When he had reached the foot of the mountain, he saw Francis coming out of a wood near the Portiuncula where



he had been praying, and approaching him. He immediately went and cast himself at his feet, humbly begging to be received into his company. "My brother," said Francis, "you are asking that God should receive you as His servant and His soldier. This is no small grace. If the emperor came to Assisi and wished to choose a favourite, everyone would say, 'Heaven grant he may choose me,' and in like manner should the choice with which God honours you be esteemed." He raised and embraced him, assuring him that his vocation came from heaven, and presented him to his companions with the words, "Here is a good brother whom God has sent us." They took their frugal morning meal together, conversed for a time on spiritual matters, then Francis went with his new disciple to Assisi to find for him a habit like the one he had himself adopted. On their way they met a woman who begged of them. Francis, turning to Egidius, said to him in a tone of great gentleness, "My brother, give thy mantle to this poor woman." Egidius did so at once, and it seemed to him as if this alms mounted up straight to heaven.

Francis was not slow to appreciate the recruit he had gained. He was enchanted as the character of Egidius daily developed itself before him and he understood the sacred treasures of his mind, his intrepid faith, his ardent longing for perfection, and his intense love for God. He found the reflection of his own image in his new disciple. "He is our Knight of the Round Table,"<sup>1</sup> Francis used to say of him, in allusion to his own early readings and dreams of chivalry. In reference to that, he might have said even more, for Egidius, thanks to the liberty that was allowed him, was to become a true knight errant. He went every-

<sup>1</sup> Brother Egidius was capable of appreciating this eulogy. He knew the songs of the troubadours, and sometimes made use of them in his exhortations. "Many," said he, "enter religion and do not perform its works. They are like a boor holding Roland's sword in his hand and not knowing what to do with it." He added: "It is not every one who can mount Roc Bayard without being thrown." It was probably after his entrance into the Order that Brother Egidius read the Song of Roland, for Francis opened to his disciples the sources from which he himself had drawn.

where, and is heard of at Tunis, at S. Niccolo di Bari, at Monte Gargano, at S. James of Compostella, at the Holy Sepulchre. He was an indefatigable pilgrim. In all his journeys, he employed himself by turns in manual labour, in preaching, and in prayer. Even amongst the Fathers of the Desert, whom in many things he resembled, few could be found who worked so much with their own hands. He wove baskets of reeds, sold water in the streets carrying a barrel on his shoulders, went to the woods to fetch faggots which he exchanged for victuals, ground knives, hired himself out for the day for the vintage, or chestnut gatherings, &c., &c. All trades were welcome to him so long as they provided him with the means of living. He prided himself on eating nothing that he had not earned, and he might have said with S. Paul, "I have not coveted any man's silver, or gold, or apparel, as you yourselves know, for such things as were needful for me and them that are with me, these hands have furnished."

Egidius preached during the intervals, and sometimes in the midst of his work. His sermons were not long discourses; they consisted rather of lively touches, suited to the various occasions that called them forth, and were pointed with good sense and supernatural force that penetrated to the hearts of his hearers. He excelled especially in stripping vice of its false attractions, and inspiring in all the desire of a better life. No one could listen to him without feeling some prickings of conscience. He spoke to all with apostolic freedom, to small and great, to priests, even to the Pope. Gregory IX., of sainted memory, once came to see him, to be a witness of his ecstasies. When he was leaving, the Pope expressed a wish to have a few words from him, words, he added modestly, that should inform him not what he was, but what he ought to be. "Holy Father," said Egidius to him, "keep your spiritual eyes pure, the right one for contemplating heavenly things, the left for judging rightly the world that you have to govern."<sup>1</sup> But what most of all

<sup>1</sup> Brother Egidius was sharper with two cardinals who had asked him to pray for them. "Why should I pray for you?" he answered; "you have more faith

seems to have impressed his contemporaries was his perseverance in prayer, his union with God, his frequent ecstasies. He was so sensible of being drawn towards God that he lived in a state of almost perpetual contemplation. The image of the Saviour on the cross, the word "paradise" pronounced in his ear, anything that reminded him of divine love, sufficed to throw him into spiritual rapture. S. Bonaventura writes of him: "With my own eyes I have seen this holy brother; his life was more that of an angel than of a man; he was continually absorbed in God." During these ecstasies he received such abundant light that, referring to one of them, he said: "I was then born into a life I knew not. The day on which I had it, is to me a birthday."<sup>1</sup> Sometimes his heart would overflow after these blissful moments, and he could not restrain his transports; if any one spoke to him of God he was completely overcome, and would kiss the flowers, trees, stones, anything that contained a vestige of the infinite beauty that had been revealed to him.

We should seem to detract something from the portraiture of this blessed servant of God, if we omitted a pious tradition that well expresses the idea his contemporaries had of his powers. It is related that "S. Louis made a pilgrimage to the tomb of S. Francis after his canonisation, and while passing through Perugia he wished to see Egidius, who was there at the time. An internal light revealed to the brother that his visitor was none other than the saintly King of France. He ran towards him, and as soon as they met they both knelt down and embraced each other tenderly, remaining clasped in each other's arms for a while without speaking. At length, after continuing thus embraced for a considerable time, they separated, and each went his way, the king on his pilgrimage, the monk to his cell. The other and more hope than I have." "How is that?" they said. "Because with all the riches and honours of this world you are confident of God's mercy—whilst I, in my poor, destitute life, fear I may still be lost." The cardinals went away without answering.

<sup>1</sup> He used to say that he was born four times; at his natural birth, at his baptism, at his entry into religion, and finally on the day of that ecstasy.

fathers in the convent, having found out it was the king who had been there, reproached Egidius. "How," said they, "when such a holy king came from France on purpose to see you, how could you be so rude as not to say one word to him?" "Ah! my beloved brethren," replied Egidius, "be not astonished if neither he nor I were able to speak a single word, for as soon as we embraced, the light of Divine Wisdom revealed his heart entirely to me, and revealed mine to him; and so by only looking into one another's heart we knew each other far better than if we had spoken, and with much greater consolation than if we had tried to express what we felt, for the human tongue is powerless to tell the secret mysteries of God" ("Fioretti"). This pretty story has one defect. Nothing in the well-known life of S. Louis authorises us to think that he ever visited Italy, therefore it is only an imagination; but how touching it is, and what delicacy of conception it shows in these men of the Middle Ages, that they could thus express the heavenly charm that exists in the union of two souls by the Truth.<sup>1</sup>

But these portraits are anticipated. As yet there were no old men, nor even any monks, at the Portiuncula. There were four young men who had resolved to serve God above all, and rigorously to practice evangelical poverty. Not one of them, not even he who had set them the example, and whom they regarded as their chief, had then begun to think of life in a cloister properly so called. Although in reality they founded one of the greatest religious families that ever existed, they founded it, as often happens with those who perform God's work, without knowing it. Firm

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin in his "Mornings in Florence," speaking of this incident, says: "Of all which story not a word, of course, is credible by any rational person. Certainly not. The spirit, nevertheless, which created the story, is an entirely indisputable fact in the history of Italy and of mankind. Whether S. Louis and Brother Giles ever knelt together in the street of Perugia matters not a whit. That a king and a poor monk could be conceived to have thoughts of each other which no words could speak; and that indeed the king's tenderness and humility made such a tale credible to the people—this is what you have to meditate on here."—(Before the Soldan, p. 89.)



in the conviction that a secret design of the Almighty had called them together, they loved each other, and prayed together without further thought for the present.

Perhaps it was Francis who more than the others gave himself up to the happiness of those first days. An angelic expression was seen upon his countenance when he looked on the brothers who had been given him. But far from growing slothful in his joy, after a short time, he returned in company with them to the apostolic life he had begun before their arrival. We have already mentioned the wood which at that time extended from the foot of the mountain, to the Portiuncula. Francis led them into this wood, and there, in one of those effusions which always made his direction so attractive, he told them what he considered to be the Divine Will. "We must," he said, "clearly understand our vocation. It is not for our personal salvation only, but for the salvation of a great many others, that God has mercifully called us. He wishes us to go through the world, and by example even more than by words exhort men to repentance and the keeping of the divine commandments." The disciples declared that they were ready for anything, and Francis, losing no time, appointed to each his work.

Bernard of Quintavalle in company with Peter, took a route that we do not know. Francis and Egidius set out for the Marches of Ancona. Nothing is more touching than this first apostolic journey. The two companions went, without following any fixed route, wherever the Spirit of God led them, along the public roads. Francis often took the lead, and, carried away by his fervour, would begin singing in a loud voice, and in French, the praises of God. These songs, or their happy countenances, sometimes even the strangeness of their costume, soon attracted the passers-by, and when a certain number were collected, Francis would address them in a few words. In these there was nothing at all resembling a sermon. All he did was to give a short spirited exhortation to fear and love God and to repent. As soon as Francis had finished, Egidius took his turn, and

said with charming simplicity : " You must believe what my brother Francis tells you ; the advice he gives you is very good." Then, without asking for anything more, the two missionaries went on their way. The impression produced by their appearance and this simple kind of preaching, was much greater than one would have supposed possible. Historians remark, that at this time the love of God was almost dead in men's hearts ; they had forgotten the very meaning of penitence, and the world was entirely given up to cupidity, to the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life. People asked what could be the object of these men who went about so badly dressed, barefooted, and eating so little. Some said, " they are madmen ; " others remarked that madmen could not say such wise things. The most thoughtful said, " They seem to care so little for life ; they are desperate, and must be either mad, or they are aspiring to very great perfection." <sup>1</sup>

Most people experienced the uneasiness that the sight of anything out of the common gives to ordinary minds. Women, the young ones especially, fled when they saw them, or had heard the first words they uttered ; they were afraid of what seemed to them such decided madness. No one spoke of being converted, but with the greater number, the interior work was deeper than they were aware of at the time. Francis had too much insight not to perceive what was going on in their hearts, and he continued in great confidence. " Our religion," he said to Brother Egidius, " will be like the fisherman who takes a great many fish in his nets—he lets the small ones go, but he keeps the largest."

When they had been through nearly the whole of the province, they went back to Assisi, where they found

<sup>1</sup> We are reminded of Bossuet who called S. Francis " the most ardent, the most enthusiastic, and, if I may say so, the most desperate lover of poverty whom perhaps the Church has ever had." The great orator had not read the *Original Lives*. After four centuries, he instinctively repeats the impressions and the very words of the contemporaries. Aut propter summam perfectionem Domino adhaeserunt, aut certi insani sunt, quia desperata viditur vita eorum.—" *Tres. Soc.*," cap. ix. page 38-39.

Bernard of Quintavalle and his companion. A few days after their return, three new companions came and begged to be admitted. They all three belonged to Assisi, and were named Sabbatini, Morito or Morico, and John of Capella. Francis received them with humility and kindness. A fourth soon after joined them. He too was from Assisi, and was called Philip, and from his tall stature was surnamed the Long. All these have remained in obscurity. John of Capella has a bad report in the chronicles, where he is called the Judas of the new apostolic college; but there is no authority amongst contemporary historians for so serious an accusation. Morico was surnamed the Small.<sup>1</sup> Probably this surname gave rise to the idea that some have had, though without good foundation, that this was the child who was attracted to S. Francis before Bernard of Quintavalle.

Celano in a few words traces a most favourable portrait of Philip. "God," he says, "had purified his heart and his lips as if with a live coal." He preached with marvellous sweetness and unction. Without having studied the Scriptures, he penetrated and explained their most hidden meaning. He was truly a disciple of those inspired men of whom the Jews said that they were without letters.

These, then, were the adepts of the new religion, eight in number. With increasing numbers, wants were multiplied, and as they had no resources it was more than ever needful to apply to public charity. Francis, whose thoughts had long been turned in that direction, thought that now the time was come to set up the banner of voluntary poverty in

<sup>1</sup> There was another Morico in the Order, for whom he has sometimes been mistaken. The other entered later, in 1212. Before that he had been a religious in the Order of the Cross-Bearers. Taken with a dangerous illness, he had himself carried to a hospital near Assisi, and was given up by the doctors, when he asked for the prayers of S. Francis. Not only did the latter pray for him, but he sent him some crumbs of bread dipped in the oil of the Sanctuary, saying, "By the power of Jesus Christ this remedy will cure our brother, and will make him for a long time one of the strongest soldiers in our army." The prophecy was accomplished. Morico was remarkable for the energy of his penitence in an Order that has numbered such great penitents within it.

the midst of men. He went up publicly to Assisi with his disciples, and they all began going from door to door, like ordinary beggars, asking for alms. This first attempt was not very successful. The poor men of Jesus Christ earned more rebuffs than assistance. Many told them, ironically, that it was absurd to ask for other people's goods, when they had spontaneously given away their own. Their relatives were still harder towards them; they considered themselves dishonoured by their behaviour, and filled the town with their complaints. Even the most moderate, thought it an unheard-of thing to make oneself a beggar from choice. Opposition was general, and even the Bishop of Assisi, benevolent as he was, was affected by it. He sent for Francis, and said to him, "I find your life very hard; is it not going a little too far, thus to renounce all possessions?" The answer Francis gave, shows how clearly he had in view the end which he was pursuing. He said to the bishop: "If we had possessions, we should want arms to defend them; for this world's goods are always occasions of disputes and law suits, and they lead to violence and war. They are the ruin of all love to God and to our neighbour, and that is why we will not have possessions in this world." Fully to understand the import of these words, we must go back to the days when they were spoken. Besides the permanent reasons which make property an object of covetousness, and oblige its owners to be on the defensive, the laws relating to it in the Middle Ages were such as to create a constant pretext for war. Those were the feudal times. Authority and power, as we know, were then attached to the soil, and lands were held under conditions of reciprocal subordination, causing their owners to be in a state of dependence on the one hand, and superiority on the other. The result was, that hardly any one was completely free, and the peaceably inclined were forced to join in any quarrel that a superior, through folly or ambition, might engage in. This state of things naturally fostered many contests.



But this was not all; besides warring amongst themselves, the feudal lords often had to struggle against those who were more completely in their hands, *i.e.*, against the villeins,—the *bons hommes*, as they were called in France, the *minors*,<sup>1</sup> as they were named in Italy, and especially at Assisi. In the beginning, they had been in complete subjection, and had been treated as people who might be taxed at the pleasure of their lords. But gradually, in spite of these disadvantages, by persevering industry, and principally by commerce, they had acquired ease and wealth. Then they began to resist, and to conspire together to obtain their rights: “the natural and necessary rights of every man, and of all human society” (Guizot, “Hist. of France”). Those who have read the history of France, know what opposition these claims met with, and how much blood was shed in that country in consequence. Nor was the strife less violent in Italy. Italian feudalism had less solidarity than had the French; but, being partly of German origin, it was perhaps more oppressive, and it constantly provoked insurrections that were often very serious. We have had one example of them in a former chapter, when we saw Francis fighting in the ranks of the people for the enfranchisement of the commune of Assisi.

Such were the almost fatal consequences of the way in which land was held at this time. Ecclesiastical property, in spite of some honourable resistance, had also been drawn into the common state of things. The Bishops and Abbots, in whose hands it was, had been obliged to take their place in the feudal hierarchy. By virtue of their domains, they became by turns suzerains and vassals, and,

<sup>1</sup> The term *minors* was sometimes employed, even in France, to designate the burgesses and the people, as is shown by the following verses of Cosnes de Béthune (1150-1224), inserted in the “Romancero français” :—

“Et sachant bien les grands et les mineurs  
Que là doit on faire chevalerie  
Où l'on conquiert paradis et honneur.”

We shall see later on how Francis gave the very name of the people to his Order.

like the lay lords, they exacted and performed feudal service, to the great detriment of their spiritual authority. This is what the keen sense of Francis had shown him, and his firm answer to the Bishop of Assisi, proves that he was determined to have nothing to do with it, either for himself or his followers. The Bishop, who, as we have said, was judicious and well-intentioned, was convinced by such a strong reason, and Francis returned to the Portiuncula more than ever strengthened in the resolve to found an Order vowed to absolute poverty.

It is not premature to make use of the term Order at this period with reference to the little company that had gathered around Francis, notwithstanding the wide extent it implies ; for God had in great measure opened the future to His servant, and had made him aware beforehand of what was yet to be. Some days after this interview with the Bishop of Assisi, Francis became absorbed for a time in meditation and self-examination, even more profound than usual. His thoughts went back to bygone years, and he thought over the ways by which he had been led. Suddenly he seemed to see the great future in store for the little flock collected around him. The part he himself was destined to fulfil alarmed him. He felt a need to go and humble himself before God, and accordingly he fled to the lonely wood where he was accustomed to pray. There he remained a long time in a species of tremor. All the sins of his life appeared before him. He accused himself of having wasted his strength and his youth ; he was confused at the idea that he was to become an instrument in the hands of God, and he could only exclaim, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!" It was a time of abandonment and desolation, and his heart was heavy with grief. But God did not forsake him. His grace, which delights to raise those who humble themselves, sought him out in the depths wherein he had fallen, bringing to him the message of mercy and pardon. Francis realised in himself, that God shows His glory by being merciful, and he began to believe that the

Almighty's goodness would be exercised in his behalf. He felt encouraged, though still divided between fear and hope. Then the Divine light finally dissipated the darkness that had accumulated upon him in his trouble. The sanctifying Spirit descended upon him, and, filling his heart, gave him the assurance that He purified him from all stains. This assurance was so strong, that Francis could no longer doubt it; he believed firmly that all his sins were remitted, and, his most intimate historian declares, doubtless from the Saint's own testimony, he was filled with ineffable joy. The Spirit of God did still more for him. He increased his powers, and for a moment raised him to a higher level, so that he saw in perfect clearness, the vast extension of his work that was to be in the future.

After this vision, Francis hastened back to his brethren. He was still in a state of rapture. "Be comforted my beloved ones," he said, "rejoice in the Lord, let not the smallness of your numbers sadden you, and be not alarmed at my simplicity and yours. God has revealed to me that he will increase you and that you shall spread to the ends of the earth. I would fain be silent of what I have seen, but my love to you obliges me to disclose it. I have seen a great multitude coming towards us to take the same habit and to lead the same life. I have seen all the roads filled with men walking this way in great haste. The French come, the Spaniards are hastening, the Germans and English are hurrying in; all the nations are stirred, and I have still in my ears the sound of those who come and go to perform the orders of holy obedience."

Thus spoke this poor man to seven others as poor as himself, in a solitary hut far away in an Umbrian valley. The splendid prediction has justly been compared with that of the prophecy of Isaias: "Jerusalem, thou who sayest I am barren. . . . Lift up thy eyes round about, and see all these are gathered together, they are come to thee. . . . Behold these shall come from afar, and behold these from the north, and from the sea, and these from the south country. . . .

The least shall become a thousand, and a little one a most strong nation."

We see here the same idea expressed in almost the same words. And the two prophecies have indeed been accomplished with such similarity, that there is no more lively image of the birth and progress of the Church, than the rapidity with which the Franciscan family has spread throughout the world. It is the remark of an author who, with a strange inversion of ideas and principles, yet often proves himself to have great insight in ecclesiastical history. "The great Umbrian movement of the thirteenth century," says M. Renan, "is, amongst all the attempts that have been made at a religious foundation, the one that most resembles the Galilean movement."<sup>1</sup>

While yet inflamed with the fire of these Divine communications, Francis sent forth his disciples to the four points of the compass. But before they started, he desired to give them some instructions, which have been collected, and which show how his soul widened with the mission that was entrusted to him. "Go two and two together," he said, "announce peace to men and preach penance for the remission of sins. You are few in number and you are unlearned, let not that hinder you. Put your trust in Him who has conquered the world. He will speak through you and will exhort by your mouth. In a little while many sages and nobles will come and join themselves to you to preach to kings, princes, and people. I have told you that God will increase and multiply this little family indefinitely. Go then without fear. You will find cruel, proud men, who will resist you with blasphemies, but you will also meet with those who are docile and kind, and who will receive you with joy. Keep these words in your hearts. Be patient in tribulations, fervent in prayer, industrious in work. Be modest in speech, serious in manners, grateful to those who do good to you. Answer all who ask you questions, and give thanks to those

<sup>1</sup> "Vie de Jésus," chap. xi.



who persecute you. A kingdom that shall not perish will be given you, in reward for what you have suffered."

When they heard him speak in this manner, those true-hearted men recognised that he was aided by God, and was speaking in His name. They fell at his feet, and declared that they were ready to go joyfully wherever he would send them. He raised them up, embraced and blessed each one, saying: "My brother, cast all your cares into the bosom of God, he will provide for your wants." A sweet invitation to trust in Providence, by which the faith of the Founder was shown, and which afterwards he always liked to make use of when he imposed some obedience on his followers.

And so they started, two and two, in three different directions. Francis took a fourth, with a companion whose name is unknown to us. This second expedition was still only an essay at apostleship, but it seems to have had more importance than the first. The new missionaries penetrated further, and found both more support and more resistance than before. They always began by announcing peace, and begging those whom they came across in the towns, on the roads, or in houses, to love the Creator of heaven and earth in truth, and to keep his commandments. A certain number of men received their message as though it were an answer to their secret aspirations, but others met them with astonishment mingled with mockery. "From whence come you?" they said, "To what unknown order do you belong?" Though these questions constantly repeated were annoying, they never took offence. "We are penitents," they answered, "who have come from Assisi." It was principally in the towns, where people are always more ready to notice anything unusual, that they suffered most. The strangeness of their attire attracted crowds around them, who, finding them passive and unresisting, began to make game of them. Some put dice into their hands and invited them to play with them; others threw stones at them, or stole their clothes, and the children hung on to their hoods to ride. Their only way of escape from these insults, or hope

of conciliating the people, was by unwearied patience, or by some of those words proceeding direct from the heart, which have so much power over a multitude.

The various impressions they made, are well illustrated by what happened to Bernard of Quintavalle and his companion. The two brethren had reached Florence, and as night drew on they begged for hospitality at the doors of all the houses. Everywhere they met with rebuffs. At last they came to a house that had a portico, and under the portico an oven. "We can anyhow sleep there," they said. They began by asking the mistress of the house if she would take them in, and on her refusal, "At least," they said, "you will allow us to pass the night under this porch?" She consented. When her husband came back he said, "Why have you let in those tramps?" "I refused to let them come into the house," she replied, "but I gave them leave to sleep under the porch where they could steal nothing except a little wood." The husband would not consent to give them any covering, feeling sure that they were dishonest people. Though it was the month of May, the nights were cold, so the poor brothers crouched close to the oven and slept indifferently, having, say the historians, nothing but the love of God to warm them, and the garments of Madam Poverty to cover them. At daybreak they went into the cathedral to hear Matins. Their hostess was there also, and when she saw how devoutly they prayed, she began to fear that she and her husband had made a mistake about them. She was soon convinced that she had been quite wrong. There was a certain charitable man named Guido who gave alms to all the poor who happened to be in the church. When he came to the brothers he wished to give them a piece of money as he did to the others, but they refused it. "Why do you refuse when you are so poor?" said he. "We are indeed poor," replied Bernard, "but for us, poverty is not painful, for by God's grace we have embraced it voluntarily." Surprised at this answer, Guido asked them if they had ever possessed anything. "Yes," continued Bernard, "we had

great possessions, but we have given all to the poor." At this moment the lady came up and, asking their pardon, begged them to come and stay in her house. They thanked her, saying: "God bless you for this good intention, though it be somewhat late in coming," and at Guido's entreaty they accepted the hospitality which he offered them and spent some days with him, greatly edifying him by their example and words, so that he afterwards gave a great part of his fortune to the poor. In short, this second appearance of the friends of poverty stirred men's minds not a little, and this was what Francis had hoped for. As soon as he saw his object attained, he thought of returning to the Portiuncula. His tender heart was anxious for those whom he had sent out defenceless into the world, and he had, besides, a great longing to see them again. He prayed to the Lord who had formerly gathered together the dispersed Israelites, that He would inspire them all with the idea of returning, and God granted his prayer. His companions arrived almost at the same time as himself at the humble chapel that they looked upon as their home and their beloved retreat. What a welcome he gave them! And how happy they were to be together again and to relate their successes, their difficulties, even their failures! It was indeed a family; they had but one heart and one mind.

What added still more to the happiness of this re-union was the enrolment of four new brethren. The three first have left little trace behind them; their names were Giovanni di S. Costanzo, Barbaro, Bernardo di Viridente. The fourth, a knight named Angelo Tancredi, will occupy more space in our history. Francis had met him in the neighbourhood of Rieti. Without knowing him, the young Founder had been struck by something in his aspect, and immediately being enlightened as to what God had in store for him, he said, "My brother, thou hast long worn belt, sword, and spurs, henceforth thy belt must be a cord, thy sword the cross of Jesus Christ, and for spurs thou must have dust and mud. Follow me. I will make thee a soldier in the Chris-

tian army." Immediately the brave soldier followed him as the apostles followed our Lord.<sup>1</sup> According to the testimony of those who lived with him, he was distinguished in the Order by a "glorious simplicity."<sup>2</sup> A delicate and evidently appropriate eulogy, which seems to imply that Brother Angelo, while accepting entirely the humility of his new life, yet retained something of his distinguished manners and chivalrous habits. Francis, who was so good a judge of true nobility, put him amongst the number of his friends. He was one of those to whom he could unburden himself the most readily, and is one of the best witnesses of the saint's life that we have.

Another vocation took its origin from this time. It was that of a priest of Assisi named Sylvester, who had already been connected with the life of Francis. When the latter undertook the restoration of the church of S. Damian, Sylvester sold him a lot of stones at a very low price, saying he wished to be associated in the good work by making advantageous terms for him with regard to the stones. But, alas! he did not persevere with these good intentions. When Francis, in a kind of rapture, was standing beside Bernard of Quintavalle on the market place of Assisi, at the moment when this firstborn of his apostleship, holding a large sum of money in the skirts of his coat, was distributing all his wealth to the poor who flocked around him, Sylvester, seeing what was going on, came up to him and said, "You know that you did not pay me the full value of those stones you bought from me." Francis, who hated avarice, instantly plunged his hand into Bernard's garment and drew it out full of pieces of money, which he gave to the priest, and a second time he was about to do the same, saying, "Are you sufficiently paid, Sir Priest?" "Yes," he answered, and went his way; but

<sup>1</sup> Wadding, "Annal.," 1210. The document from which the annalist borrows this account is not authentic. There is a constant tradition that Brother Angelo was noble.

<sup>2</sup> *Gloriosæ simplicitatis*, 1 Cel. pag. 86. Brother Angelo is, we know, one of the companions who have recorded the youth of the saint.



remorse soon took possession of him. He saw Francis pouring out gold without counting it, and he heard his somewhat ironical question. "Truly," he said to himself, "I am a wretch. At my age I care so much for money, while this young man has learnt to despise it for the love of God!" An incident added still more to this impression. The following night he saw in a dream a great cross which seemed to come out of the mouth of Francis, its top reached to heaven, and its arms stretched out over the whole earth. When he awoke he no longer doubted that Francis was a true friend of Christ. He began to do penance in his own house. When he saw eleven brethren grouped around Francis, the moment seemed come for him to tell the saint how greatly he regretted having vexed him. Then, as God continued to draw him, some months later, after the approbation at Rome of the new religion, he humbly begged to take part in it. Francis welcomed him with peculiar deference, because he was a priest, and from that time Sylvester passed his life in poverty and in the habitual exercise of contemplation, and he was not long in reaching a high degree of virtue. We shall see the holy Founder appeal to his judgment in a circumstance when the whole future of the Order was in question.

## CHAPTER V.

### APPROBATION OF THE RULE, 1209-1210.

THE little community had been in existence for some months, and since the last arrivals, the number of its members amounted to twelve. Francis, in whom God developed the spirit of a Founder in proportion as He gave him the work of one to perform, now began to think of making laws for the community. Till this time each one had been at liberty to follow the dictates of his own piety. There were no common exercises, no Divine Office, nothing of what, strictly speaking, constitutes a religious Order. In the beginning, the brethren had asked Francis to teach them how they ought to pray, and he, who was as simple in his relations with God as they were, answered : " Say : Our Father who art in heaven . . ." Then, on their further request, he recommended to them another still shorter prayer : " We adore Thee O Christ, and we bless Thee, because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world " ; and beyond this he gave them no further suggestions. This state of things, without inconvenience as long as they were few in number, was quite unsuitable when their numbers increased. Francis perceived this, and obeying the guidance of God, whose voice is heard when circumstances arise requiring His direction, he set about drawing up a Rule. This Rule has not come down to us, but we know that it was only a rough sketch. " It was short, and very simple," say the historians. Francis began, in the same terms as the Gospel, to repeat the counsels of our Lord on renunciation of the world and abandonment of its goods. Those divine words had been his light, and he wished his disciples to have them before their eyes, that they might always behold their first

law and their reason of existence. Then, like all monastic legislators, he prescribed obedience and chastity. He assigned the principal place to poverty, it was to be the special characteristic of the Order he was founding, and he intended it to be carried to its furthest limits: neither individuals nor houses could have possessions under any pretext. They were to live upon alms from day to day, and they were forbidden to receive money. All the rules relating to this fundamental point were formulated with precision, and there were but few others laid down. Francis never approved of entangling his children in a mesh of detailed obligations. He limited himself to some few arrangements necessary for producing order and uniformity of action, without which community life is impossible.

When the Rule was ready, Francis wished to go to Rome to submit it to the approbation of the Sovereign Pontiff. This approbation was not indispensable, nor had former founders of Orders usually solicited it, since no ecclesiastical law had then made it obligatory.<sup>1</sup> It was a spontaneous desire of S. Francis to obtain this sanction. With more foresight and judgment than he has sometimes been credited with, he had a presentiment of all the opposition his work would encounter, and looking around for a support against this opposition, he saw but one, and that was the express protection of the highest authority in the Church. There was only one difficulty in the way. He was young, without interest, and a stranger to ecclesiastical usages. How could he succeed in getting to the Pope, or how make him favour a design which so many men condemned as impossible? A dream that he had one night, at length put an end to his perplexity. He thought that he was walking along a road, by the side of which grew a tree of enormous size. He approached it, and as he was admiring its beauty, a secret power lifted him up so high that he touched its top and bent its uppermost branches to the ground. He did not doubt that this dream signified that a happy reception

<sup>1</sup> It was made so in 1215 at the fourth Lateran Council.

awaited him at the pontifical court. He immediately made up his mind, and the next day, calling the brethren together, he said to them : " My brothers, I see that God in His goodness wishes to extend our association. Let us go to our Mother, the Holy Roman Church, and make known to the Holy Father what God has condescended to begin by us. Then we will continue our work according to his will and instructions." Now it was their turn to hesitate. They felt they were too simple to appear at the court of Rome, but Francis soon reassured them. He explained to them the important reasons that he considered made this step necessary, then he told them how he himself had dreaded it as much as they did, but that God had made him understand that his fears were vain. He related his dream, and the brethren made no further objections. Just as they were starting, Francis said : " Let us choose one of us to be our chief. We will look upon him as the Vicar of Jesus Christ for us ; we will go whither he wills us to go, we will sojourn where he wills us to sojourn." They agreed to this proposal, and Bernard of Quintavalle was elected Superior. Then the little company set out, beguiling the way with prayers and pious discourses.

Unexpected assistance awaited them in the Eternal City. The Bishop of Assisi was there, and they met him almost as soon as they arrived. This venerable prelate was at first a little disturbed at seeing them. He was greatly attached to them, and hoped for much edification to his people from their virtues and way of life. He feared that they were thinking of settling in another diocese. But when they told him the object of their journey, he was quite reassured, and promised to do his best for them. He had a friend in one of the most eminent members of the Sacred College. This was the Cardinal John of S. Paul, Bishop of Sabina, of the house of Colonna, a man full of God, one who had never been dazzled by the grandeur of his position, but was always willing to be at the service of those who aspired after virtue. The Bishop had already related the touching history of



Francis to him, and had spoken of what God had begun to do through his means. The Cardinal had been so much interested in this account that the bishop did not hesitate to make him acquainted with the brothers, now they had come so unexpectedly to Rome, and he took them to his palace. When the Cardinal saw them, and heard the sincerity of their words, and perceived the firmness of their purpose, he felt convinced that they were men who were being led by the Divine Spirit ; but being wise and prudent, he thought it right to submit them to a longer examination. He took Francis aside, and asked him a number of questions, and put before him all the difficulties of the work he was undertaking. "It is beyond your strength," he said, and he advised him rather to choose some Order already in existence, or, if he preferred it, to lead the life of a hermit like that of the Carthusians and Camaldolesi. Francis, while expressing deference to his opinions, kept to his purpose. "You are mistaken," said the Cardinal, "it is much better to follow the beaten tracks." Francis again protested that he knew all his insufficiency, but that he believed he was obeying God's designs. Then the Cardinal, who, in his heart, would have been sorry if his advice had been taken, entered into his ideas, gave him encouragement, and promised to support him with the Pope. At the same time he recommended himself to the prayers of Francis, and with an exquisite mixture of kindness and humility, told him that from henceforth he wished to be regarded as one of his brothers.

These interviews had lasted through several days. It was probably on one of those days that Francis, impatient of the cardinal's apparent hesitation, ventured on a bold step. He succeeded in penetrating, no one knows how, into the Lateran palace, and presented himself before the Sovereign Pontiff with all his brethren. Innocent III. still occupied the Holy See. This Pontiff, so dear to the Church, with his talent for governing, and his entire devotion to the duties of his office, at the time that Francis accosted him, was greatly pre-occupied with the dangers that on all sides were threatening

the House of God. As he walked in a gallery called the Belvedere, he was meditating on what remedy could be found for this sad situation. The sight of this troop of poor men suddenly coming to disturb his meditations, somewhat provoked him, and he had them turned out without giving them time to explain what they had come for. Perhaps the humility with which they retreated, or some words that he may have overheard from them, made an unexpected impression on him; but he himself relates that in the following night, in his sleep he saw a little palm tree spring up at his feet, which immediately grew and became a splendid tree. When he awoke, the dream was still in his mind, and without knowing why, he felt a conviction that the little palm-tree was none other than the poor man he had sent away the evening before, and while he was thinking over it, the Cardinal of S. Paul came in. "I have found," he said, "a man whom I look upon as very perfect. He is resolved to follow literally the evangelical counsels, and I have no doubt but that God intends to make use of him to reanimate faith in the whole Church." The Pope was much struck by this coincidence, but he restrained himself so as not to let the Cardinal perceive the thoughts that were agitating his mind; he merely told him that he should like to see the man of whom he spoke. The Cardinal sent for Francis, who was lodging close to the Lateran in the hospital of S. Antony, and on the morrow he presented him, with his twelve companions, to the Sovereign Pontiff, who immediately recognised them as the men he had driven away.

This time, the interview was marked with great Christian cordiality. Francis, encouraged by the welcome he received, set forth with much fervour what God had inspired him to undertake, and when he had finished speaking, Innocent, who had listened to him with strict attention, answered him in the most benevolent manner. He said: "My children, the life to which you aspire seems to us hard and difficult. Doubtless your fervour is great, and we have no anxiety on your account, but it is our duty to consider those who will come

after you. We must not impose upon them a burden which they cannot bear. All this requires serious reflection." He added that he would confer with the cardinals, and would give them a definite answer after this consultation.

The Sacred College was convoked without much delay, and Innocent III. put the question before it in precise terms : Is it well to approve of a new congregation of men whose members and houses will be constrained to absolute poverty ?

It was not the first time that a reform, with poverty as its basis, had been presented before the Councils of the Papacy. This austere virtue had, at that period, gained such an extraordinary ascendancy, that we cannot omit here giving some explanation of it. We have already hinted that this ascendancy arose in great measure from the situation in which the Church had been placed by feudalism. No one can deny the advantages that civil society owed, at least for a time, to the feudal system, but it seems no less certain that this system, in two instances, was the source of great danger to the Church. The first time was when it was in the full vigour of its recent institution. By introducing something like order into the universal anarchy, people were persuaded that it was their only hope of salvation from misery, and they could see no better remedy. The lay lords, supported by general opinion, easily imagined themselves to be everything, and that, by the investiture of ecclesiastical fiefs, the spiritual as well as the civil authority depended entirely upon them. The distinction between the two powers was obscured, and for a while there was danger of their being confounded together, to the advantage of the nobles. This was the complication which required no less than the genius of Gregory VII. to resolve. We know at the price of what struggles this holy and undaunted Pontiff saved the Church, by restoring to men's minds the notion of religious independence.

But in the pursuit and attainment of this result, he had been obliged to leave the bishops and abbots entangled in the feudal system ; he could hardly have done otherwise.

Hence arose a new danger, which speedily equalled the one just escaped from. A worldly spirit spread through the Church. Ecclesiastical dignitaries were mixed up in business affairs and interests, and imitated the manners of the great lords. They vied with them in luxury, in ambition, and sometimes, alas! in vices of all sorts. They *baronised*, to use the expression invented by the chroniclers of that day. It was a scandal, and an injury to the conscience of the public. A strong reaction seemed necessary. Riches, the visible cause of all this evil, were openly denounced. On all sides but one remedy was called for, a return to the simplicity of the early Church. Some, as faithful sons jealous of the honour of their mother, endeavoured to bring about this reform in the bosom of the Church and to her own interests. S. Bernard, for instance, multiplied his warnings, while at the same time he was himself a brilliant example of what ought to be done. A community of gentlemen and laymen was formed in the neighbourhood of Milan; they took the name of Humiliants, imposed on their members a habit of a grey colour, and obliged them to live frugally by the work of their own hands. But these efforts did not go far enough. Clairvaux, the place where during some years, according to Bossuet's eloquent expression, had been seen "the most finished image of the Primitive Church," lost nearly all its glory in losing its Founder. The Humiliants never extended their influence very far, though God gave them two saints in less than thirty years.<sup>1</sup> In short, the road to be followed had been indicated rather than widely opened.

The ill-disposed, or those who were incapable of finding true remedies, made the miserable state to which souls were reduced, a tool for rending the unity of the Catholic Church, and for founding separate sects. They certainly displayed great activity, and till the establishment of the Mendicants, they were more numerous than the Catholic reformers. As

<sup>1</sup> The first was the blessed Guy, one of the first gentlemen who had embraced the reform; the second, S. John of Meda, who, altering the original plan, made of the Humiliants an Order properly so called. Cf. *Acta S.S.*, 26 Sept.



early as 1130 a man who had learnt boldness from his intimacy with Abelard, the eloquent Arnold of Brescia, maintained, that according to the gospel, priests and religious have no right to possess property or to exercise seignorial rights. The sudden application of such a principle as this would have brought on a violent revolution. Nevertheless, Arnold obtained much success in Lombardy, and what is more astonishing, he even found partisans in Rome. In 1180 the Waldensians, or Poor Men of Lyons, thinking that riches had irremediably corrupted the hierarchy, asserted that "there was nothing but wooden shoes to remedy the evil," consequently they attacked everything they saw in the Church. Its feudal system was the especial object of their accusations. "The prelates must have a spade put into their hands," they said harshly, "instead of that sword which they are not fitted to wear." When Rome justly rejected their programme, they founded private churches where they only admitted as preachers those amongst them who lived simply, and seemed to be animated by the Holy Spirit. These schismatical exaggerations became all at once, much in vogue. After spreading through the east of France, they invaded the north of Italy, where they were received with open arms. The *Cathari*, or Albigenses, were still more dangerous. Their ancient dualistic principles, had they kept to them alone, would have met with no more response in the twelfth century than they had in preceding centuries. They concealed this metaphysical side of their doctrine till they should become stronger, and presented themselves principally in the character of an austere church opposed to luxury, truly Christian, imitating primitive times, and cultivating humble virtues. These tactics obtained for them an alarming popularity, and they made use of it to advance, with a talent for organisation, and a science of government worthy of a better cause. At the accession of Innocent III. they swarmed in the south of Europe, and had spread ramifications into Flanders, Germany, and England. "They formed," says M. Schmidt, "in the midst of the Catholic world, an heretical church,

strongly organised, and powerful through the zeal of its members, as well as by the close relationship which united them into a single body.”<sup>1</sup>

This cursory statement, by giving an idea of the tendencies of the period, will enable us to imagine what were the thoughts of the cardinals who came to take part in the deliberation to which they had been invited. In principle there was nothing to displease them in a new institute of poverty. Since the people were so strangely ready to follow the standard of poverty as soon as they saw it held up before them, this seemed to be the way by which they were to be led, provided always that the standard was held by a sure and faithful hand. This was the point that required the greatest precaution. Experience had more than once shown that, in receiving a supposed auxiliary from God, they might fall upon a mischief-maker and sower of discord.

Who was this young man who now offered himself for this arduous task? By what mark could they recognise in him one of those humble souls whom God from time to time raises up, when the Church is in need of some desired and necessary aid? None of them could have any prejudice against Francis, but all were a little disconcerted to see him from the very beginning go beyond all that friends or enemies had yet done in the way of renunciation. The first point they discussed was this entirely new feature. They maintained that he went beyond due limits, and that human nature could not long endure such severities. These reasons, calmly and forcibly put forth, were beginning to impress the Council, when the Cardinal of S. Paul rose and said: “If we refuse the petition of this poor man on the plea that his rule is difficult, let us beware lest we reject the Gospel itself, for the rule which he desires us to approve of

<sup>1</sup> “*Histoire et doctrine de la Secte des Cathares ou Albigeois*” tom. i. pag. 145. The Cathari were as numerous in Italy as the Albigenses were in the south of France. Lombardy especially was infested with them. They had two bishops in Milan. The republic, being closely allied to the Sovereign Pontiffs in politics, opposed them on the religious question. The Middle Ages abound in contrasts of this kind.

is in conformity with the teaching of the Gospel, and to say that evangelical perfection contains anything unreasonable or impossible, is to rise up against the author of the Gospel, and to blaspheme Jesus Christ." The force of these words was increased by the fact that the rule they were discussing was almost exclusively composed of texts borrowed from the Gospels. Still, the Pope, who felt himself drawn in contrary directions, would not come to a conclusion yet ; he only said to Francis : "Go, my son, and pray to God that He may let us know whether what you ask is from Him, and if it is, we will grant your desire."

Francis continued to pray for several days. At the appointed time he returned to the Pope. "Holy Father," he said, "this is what has been shown to me during my prayers. A maiden beautiful, but very poor, dwelt in the wilderness. A king saw her, and charmed by her grace, he married her. For some years he lived with her, and they had children of singular beauty. The mother brought up these children with great care, and when they were grown, she said : 'Dear children, do not blush at being poor, you are the sons of a king ; go to your father, and he will give you all you want.' So the children came to court, and the king, recognising in them his own features, said : 'Whose sons are you ?' And when they answered : 'We are the sons of the poor woman who lives in the wilderness,' the king joyfully embraced them and said : 'Be not afraid, you are my children. If strangers live at my table, how much more shall I not care for my sons !' This king," continued Francis, with a bold confidence that became more and more apparent in his words, "is the King of kings, and, thanks to His goodness, I am the wife of the solitude and the wilderness. He, my sweet Saviour, has promised to provide for the wants of all the children He shall give me. 'I,' he said, 'who give to all creatures what is needful for them, who make My sun to rise on the just and on sinners, how much more shall I not nourish these sons of My Gospel who have such right to my solicitude !' "

These accents and this faith, "this regal attitude," to borrow Dante's fine expression when he sang of this scene,<sup>1</sup> triumphed over Innocent III.'s last hesitation. "Truly," cried the Pontiff, "this is indeed the man who has been called to sustain and to repair the Church of God."<sup>2</sup> And in explanation of these words, he related how, some time before, after a day on which he had been anxiously considering the misfortunes of the Church, he saw in his sleep a mendicant supporting the Lateran Basilica which was tottering and ready to fall. Then, bending towards the man whom he believed was called to this high mission, he embraced him paternally, and unreservedly, but in words only, gave his approval to the rule which he presented to him. "Go," he said to the little band, "go with God's blessing, and preach penitence to all, in the way that He is pleased to inspire you with. And when the Almighty has made you grow in grace and in numbers, return joyfully and tell me of it; you will find that I trust you, and I will accord you still greater favours." At these words Francis prostrated himself at his feet, promised him devoted obedience, and retired praising the Saviour who, according to His promise, had inclined towards him the heart of his Vicar upon earth.

The Cardinal of S. Paul did not desert his clients after this success, the honour of which was in part attributable to him. He felt that they still needed his advice, and he assembled them several times at his house to consult with them about the organisation of their Order. At the suggestion, or perhaps at the command, of the Sovereign Pontiff,

<sup>1</sup> "*Ma regalmente sua dura intenzione  
Ad Innocenzio aperse.*"—Parad. xi. 91.

<sup>2</sup> The Papacy has remained faithful to Innocent's judgment. It thought that, having had Francis for a helper on earth, it might reckon him amongst its best patrons in heaven. Up to a recent date, 1750, in the mass for the coronation of the Sovereign Pontiff, there were three collects—the first of the Holy Spirit, the second of the Blessed Virgin, the third of S. Francis. In the latter, the newly-elected Pope addressed the ancient support of those who had preceded him, "*ut sicut olim reparavit Ecclesiam, eamdem sustentet.*" That he would ever sustain that Church which he had formerly raised from its ruins. Cf. Furaris Vo. Papa.



he wished them all to receive the tonsure, that they might belong to the Church's Orders, and be able to preach in her name. There is no doubt that Francis was a deacon. It is supposed, with great probability, that the Order was conferred on him in the present circumstances perhaps by the Bishop of Assisi who was still in Rome, or by the Cardinal himself. After they had received these favours, master and disciples made a final pilgrimage to the tomb of the holy apostles, and then started on their way to Assisi through the valley of Spoleto.

Their hearts were overflowing with joy. As they journeyed along the road, they conversed eagerly about all that had taken place, their fortunate meeting with the Bishop of Assisi, the powerful protection of the Cardinal of S. Paul, the gracious benevolence of the Holy Father, the unexpected honour of the clericulture, and in all these circumstances they saw the intervention of God Who was guiding them and visibly presiding over their destinies. Then their thoughts would turn towards the future, and they sought in what manner they could best observe the Rule they had accepted, in its entire truth; they determined to walk in the sight of the Most High in all uprightness and religion, and they exhorted one another to live in such a holy manner that their examples might stir up their fellow Christians. They were so absorbed in these pious thoughts that they forgot to eat and drink. On one occasion the pre-occupation of their minds had been so great that when evening came on they had taken nothing. They began to feel the attacks of hunger, and they saw no dwelling-place near them, nor did they know where they could find food. Suddenly a man appeared carrying a loaf of bread in his hand. He gave it to the brethren and disappeared. This fresh instance of God's care filled them with admiration; it comforted them as much as did the bread itself, and in their gratitude they resolved never to abandon poverty, in whatsoever strait or necessity they might find themselves.

When they reached the little town of Orte at the junction of the Nar and the Tiber, they remained about a fortnight in the beautiful country in its vicinity, resting there awhile from their journey. Here they seem to have considered a question affecting the future of the monastic life: Should they settle in solitary places, or construct their poor monasteries in towns and in the midst of men? Francis, who was always diffident about following his own ideas, begged all his brethren to consult God on the subject. After having prayed, they came to an unanimous decision. Following the example of Him who sacrificed Himself for all men, it seemed right that they should establish themselves in the heart of cities, where they could edify and save the greatest number of souls. Francis agreed that so it should be, and the little company, not wishing to make further delay, continued its journey to Assisi.

They stopped a little below the town, not far from the Portiuncula, in a hut standing near a winding stream, called on this account Rivo Torto. It was a deserted structure, calculated to delight the heart of the most ardent lover of poverty. It was so small that the brethren were crowded together when they were all inside, and they could not have accommodated themselves at all in it had not Francis marked out a place for each one with his name written in chalk on the beam above it. Besides this there were no houses near, and no one came to help the poor community; more than once the brethren were without bread. Then they went in search of roots and herbs which they chanced to find growing in the valley, and ate them with the enjoyment that others find in delicate food. Perhaps their most painful privation was in the fact that there was nothing near them that at all resembled an oratory. Wadding asserts, with great probability, that a wooden cross erected outside the hut, was their altar, their book, and their breviary all in one. There they knelt, separately, or all together, and meditated on the sufferings of the Saviour,

until, overcome with emotion, they would break out into prayers and tears.

Francis encouraged them to keep a great heart in this little house,<sup>1</sup> and he supported them with his own courage and enriched them with his own fulness of spirit. It was just at the beginning of autumn, a season when the Umbrian valley is in its greatest beauty. In the day-time the sky is clear, the air mild and soft, and at sunset a warm light clothes the summit of the mountains ; the nights are brilliant with myriads of stars. Francis enjoyed the sensations of peace and calmness that he gathered from these beauties of nature ; the admiration he had felt in his youth for the spectacles of the world returned to him and found its right use—he employed it to enlarge his thoughts and to give more fervour to his prayers. He wished to teach his disciples to do the same. He told them that creation is a book in which the Creator has written His name, and he showed them how easily an attentive soul can discover Him, and love and adore Him in His works and on account of these works. This was not the only lesson he gave them in the conversations he had with them at that time. The privations they had to undergo, led them constantly to speak of poverty, and he tried to inspire them with a high idea of it. He presented it to them as the soul of the Christian life, the surest means of perfection, a pledge, and if sincerely loved, a foretaste of eternal blessings. On the other hand, he showed them how riches are almost always fatal to those who possess them, for they dissipate the mind, inflate the heart, enervate the will, and undermine the whole life. “Believe me,” he said in conclusion, “one goes to heaven quicker from a cottage than from a palace.”

A solemn occasion gave him an opportunity of teaching them practically how little value they should set upon

<sup>1</sup> Another friend of poverty, an illustrious religious of our own times, has expressed the same sentiment in a like manner. “A great heart in a little house,” wrote Lacordaire, “is the thing that has always touched me most.” “*Lettres à des jeunes gens*,” p. 235.

human grandeur. In September 1209, not long after their settlement at Rivo Torto, Otho of Brunswick passed near their dwelling with a brilliant train of German noblemen. He was on his way to Rome with great pomp to receive the Imperial crown from the hands of Innocent III. Francis did not go out himself to see him pass, nor did he wish the brethren to do so, but foreseeing, by a supernatural intuition, the tragic fate that awaited the new emperor, he ordered one of the brethren to stand by his path and boldly announce to him that all this glory would be of short duration. God thus consecrated the young master in the eyes of his disciples by placing the aureole of a prophet on his brow.

He was soon to have also the glory that comes from eloquence. He had hardly returned from Rome when the priests of S. George's, who had educated him, and who had ever since followed the operations of grace in his life with paternal interest, came and invited him to preach for them. This sermon, the first he had preached in a church, was, doubtless only an attempt, but it must have had great merit, for it induced the Bishop of Assisi, who returned to his diocese a few days afterwards, to venture on a bolder experiment. This eminent prelate brought back from the eternal city an ever-increasing affection for him whom he loved to call his son. All that he had seen and heard of him, and especially his eloquence before Innocent III., and his fine victory over the opposition of the Sacred College, had filled him with admiration. He felt sure that Francis was destined to perform a great work in the Church. He wished the first fruits of his apostleship to be in Assisi, and though the experiment was not altogether without risk, he appointed him to preach in his cathedral church. History does not specify the time when this preaching began, but we know that it continued through several consecutive Sundays, and it is most probable that they were the Sundays in Advent 1209, or in Lent 1210. The young orator surpassed the Bishop's expectations. The Basilica soon became too small to contain the crowds who flocked to hear him. "Men



and women," says Celano, "ran from all sides, priests and clerics came in numbers, and the religious hastened down from their monasteries on the mountains." Everyone was anxious to see and hear the new Saint, as they called him, the extraordinary man who seemed about to repeat in his own person the marvels of the ages of faith. And all who heard him felt their hearts stirred with deep emotion. There was but one opinion amongst the learned as well as amongst the people: "No one spoke like this man. His appearance should be hailed as the dawn of better days. He was a rising star, whom heaven was sending to dissipate the darkness into which the world had sunk."

It is not difficult to give a reason for this brilliant success. The people of Assisi had never quite lost sight of the man whom they had formerly looked upon as an honour to their town. His sudden conversion had indeed for a time disconcerted his admirers, but his constancy and undeniable sincerity had soon brought back all hearts to him. Even before his journey to Rome, though they were not aware of it, he was gaining ascendancy over them by that virtue which shrinks from no sacrifice, and always has such power over men. This ascendancy increased when they learned that the genius of Innocent III. had bowed before the greatness of his designs. Hence he was preceded by a sort of prestige, when, illuminated with the grace of his diaconate, and strong in the mission that he had received, he ascended the pulpit of S. Rufinus. He preached on salvation, penitence, concord, and peace, subjects which have been treated of at all times, but which, owing to the troubles and agitations of that epoch, then came home to men's minds with especial force. Moreover, the young apostle treated them with singular boldness. Without overstepping the bounds of prudence, he touched the deepest wounds of the society he had before him, and as one who, in the sight of all his hearers, had acquired the right to say everything, he proclaimed the truth without respect to persons. His words occasioned a salutary terror, mingled with an indescribable charm. Not

that he made use of any art : the parable which he addressed to the Pope proves with what graceful imagination he could invest the most familiar subjects, and this vein of poetry re-appeared in his discourses. They were full of lively sallies and brilliant points that almost took away the breath of his listeners. It is much to be regretted that none of them have been preserved to us.

But though we have not the sermons, we have two documents which are proofs of the effect they produced. The first is of the highest importance. It is no less than the charter of the commune, signed, in the month of November 1210, by the citizens of Assisi assembled in the great hall of parliament. The document is too lengthy and detailed to be cited entirely, but we will extract its principal clauses, and they will enable us to judge of the spirit which dictated them.

It opens in a solemn, religious style, unlike that of any other document of this period, as the historian of the town informs us. It begins thus : "*In the Name of God. Amen. The grace of the Holy Spirit be with you. To the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary.*" After this exordium, the citizens declare that there shall be no more hatred or divisions amongst them. These are the words : "The following convention has been made for ever between the *majors* and the *minors* of Assisi. Neither party shall, without mutual consent, make any compact with the Pope, his nuncios and legates, or with the emperor, king, or their nuncios and legates, or with any town or fortress, or with any potentate whatsoever, but they shall act together, agreeing in common to do all that ought to be done for the honour, safety, and progress of the commune of Assisi. None of the *majors* shall make plots within or without the town, nor shall the *minors*, but all shall live as a community and commune, and shall do in the name of the commune all that is considered to be advantageous to it and to the good citizens."

Then comes the essential part of this convention, the enfranchisement of the citizens who had been reduced to the condition of serfs. They seem to have been very numerous.

The charter declares them to be universally relieved from their condition of liege men (*hominitium*) and from the service they were bound to render to their lord. The conditions under which this was to be accomplished were lenient for those who were favoured by fortune, and amounted to almost nothing in the case of the very poor. The greatest facilities are provided for both. For example, there is a stipulation that the modest sum for their ransom might be paid in kind, and that the consul of the town could receive it officially, in the case of any lord refusing it as insufficient. It protects them against all exactions, by decreeing that the magistrates charged with presiding at the liberation of persons, and drawing up the public act concerning them, could not receive more than six farthings (*deniers*) as fee.

Finally, a special article enjoins the consul to push on actively the works of the new Basilica of S. Rufinus, that had been begun in 1140 on the plan of the architect John of Gubbio.

All these provisions are most generous. It is evident that a town, which adopted them unanimously, must have been under the influence of a great wave of religion, justice and charity. The tenor of the document, and a comparison of dates, leave no doubt as to the origin of this happy impulse, of a kind so rarely met with in a population. With the learned historian of Assisi, we attribute it to the example and first preaching of S. Francis.<sup>1</sup> The second document gives striking support to this conclusion. It is an inscription still to be read on the outside of S. Maria Maggiore. This church was being rebuilt at the time of the charter of which we have been speaking. This is what was engraved in 1210 on one of the stones of the apse: *In the time of Bishop Guido and Brother Francis*.<sup>2</sup> . . . Thus

<sup>1</sup> Cristofani, "Delle Storie d'Assisi," lib. ii. p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* A learned Italian, the Abbé Faloci, has recently published a *facsimile* of this inscription. M. Cristofani has read it wrongly. Its date is 1216. Part of the above reflections on the subject hold good, but it cannot be said to have been composed in consequence of the first preaching of S. Francis.

the people of Assisi felt that they were indebted to S. Francis, and they placed him in the same rank with their Bishop and official personages. They reckoned that his name in future would be so widespread that it would cast light upon the history of the most venerable edifices. Never has any town that we know of, presumed so magnificently on the future glory of one of its sons.

It was at this time that Francis gave the name of *Minors* to his brothers.<sup>1</sup> One of them was reading aloud the Rule of the Order, and he came to this passage, "and let the brethren be less than all others"; in the original, *et sint minores*. The expression *minores*, *minors*, struck Francis like a ray of light. It was the name of the people whom he so greatly loved and who loved him so much in return, and besides, it was one of the words to which the Gospel has given the highest honour. For these two reasons it seemed to him a most appropriate denomination for his followers and for himself. He stopped the reader, and said gravely to his companions: "My brothers, I wish from henceforth that this fraternity should be called the Order of Minors." It has often been said that the children of S. Francis are supremely the apostles of the people. It could not be otherwise. From the beginning they have borne their name and worn their garb, and they have always shared in their sufferings and their best aspirations. There is one of those contracts between them that cannot be destroyed, but will exist throughout the ages.

There is only one fact to be mentioned relating to the preaching of S. Francis, that happened at Rivo Torto. The brethren did not accompany him to S. Rufinus. He usually left them on the afternoon of Saturday, and went up alone to Assisi, where he passed the night in a house belonging to the canons, praying and meditating on the subject he intended to treat on the morrow. One of these nights was marked by a prodigy. One half of the brethren were asleep while the other half were praying. Suddenly a chariot of

<sup>1</sup> The poet who has translated Celano indicates the date, p. 150.



fire appeared in the humble monastery, and went slowly round it ; within it was a globe that reflected such brilliance that the whole of the poor hut was illuminated by it. The brothers who were sleeping, awoke and beheld the spectacle with those who were praying, then the marvellous light lit up the most secret recesses of their hearts, and they could read one another's thoughts clearly, and were able to know each other better than they had ever done before. Later, the whole Order thus interpreted the vision : it was the soul of Francis which had appeared to them, and God had sent this apparition for two reasons : to show them by a vivid image what an ardent fire burned within His servant, and, dealing with them as He did with Eliseus, He revealed to them that He had made of Francis a new Elias, the chariot and leader of His people.

Soon after this the brothers left their uncomfortable abode, not so much on account of its discomfort, as in consequence of an almost comic adventure, which shows how entirely they were at the mercy of everyone. A peasant, passing by with his ass, found the place to his liking, and without concerning himself about its occupants, determined to take possession of it. He drove in his beast. "Go in, Bruno," he said, "we shall be well off here." Francis was a little disconcerted at this noisy invasion. Turning to his brethren, he said : "Truly we have not been called to show hospitality to asses, and we have a right to some quiet when we retire after preaching to give ourselves to meditation and praise." So they went out, and after some consultation returned to the cells they had left when they went to Rome. When the Benedictine Abbot of Monte Subasio heard of their return, either of his own accord, or at the request of the Bishop of Assisi, he gave up to them the little chapel, which, notwithstanding the labour Francis had spent on it, was still the property of his monastery. Thanks to this liberality, S. Mary of the Portiuncula became the definite seat of the new Order. "It was fitting," says S. Bonaventura, "that the place which, by the merits of the Holy Mother of God,

had sheltered its beginnings, should by the same protection become the theatre of its progress and development."

This progress began almost immediately after their arrival. A great number of brothers presented themselves, attracted from all sides by the increasing renown of Francis. Four of these are better known to us than the rest. They are the brothers Juniper, Masseo, Rufinus, and Leo.

Juniper had the simple, ardent soul of a child ; the idea of the present moment occupied him entirely, and if it were good in itself he was incapable of seeing any reason for not carrying it out. On a certain festival day, for instance, they had intrusted to him the care of the ornaments and sacred vessels in a church. A poor woman came up to him while he was at his post, and asked for alms. Without hesitation, he gave her part of what was in his charge. It was difficult to convince him that he had done wrong. "All that is superfluous," he said, "and the poor woman was in such need." Justice in his mind had been veiled by charity. He made hundreds of these pious mistakes. S. Clara, who knew him, said of him when she saw him carried away by his good intentions: "He is the plaything of Jesus Christ." S. Francis loved him too, though he caused him many an embarrassment. "Never mind," he said, adding, with a play upon his name: "we want a whole forest of such Junipers."

Of very different stamp was Brother Masseo, of Marignano, near Assisi. According to Celano, his principal virtue was a gift of exquisite discretion. He soon exercised great influence in the Order, and Francis, who throughout his life was always sensible to politeness and good manners, made him his frequent companion on his journeys. He would often say: "To be perfect, a Friar Minor should, amongst other qualities, have the good address, judgment, natural eloquence, and affability of Brother Masseo."

Brother Rufinus belonged to the noble family of Scifi, the ancient possessors of the citadel of Sasso Rosso, which

commanded the town of Assisi. His unexpected vocation made a great stir in the town. It moved still more deeply, one of his young relatives named Clara. From that time she gave herself up to holy thoughts, and two years later she joyfully followed in his footsteps. From his first entrance into the Order, Brother Rufinus was remarkable for the courage with which he accepted all its duties, and though untrained to austerities, he endured fatigue and privations better than any one. Francis was full of admiration of him. "It has been revealed to me," he said, "that he is one of the three holiest souls of this time. I do not hesitate to give him the title of Saint: he is, from henceforth, canonised in heaven."

Perhaps the one whom Francis loved most of all was Brother Leo. He was his S. John, say those who like to compare him in all things to our Lord. Brother Leo was from Viterbo. As is sometimes the case, there was a complete contrast between his body and his soul; the former was strong and robust, the latter full of gentleness, reserve, and purity. Francis soon discovered what refinement was hidden under the rather coarse exterior, and familiarly he used to call him "the Good God's little lamb." He made him his ordinary companion and his most intimate confidant. He even chose him for his confessor, not wishing to have any secret from him, and desiring that he should assist as a chaste witness at the most hidden mysteries of his supernatural life. Some of their conversations have become celebrated; we can imagine nothing more charming or more elevated. We will here relate the one best known, in which S. Francis, by Divine inspiration, gave a lesson on what things constitute perfect joy.

The two friends were returning from Perugia in the winter, and were suffering from cold. "Brother Leo," said Francis, "if it should please God to let the Friars Minor give a great example of holiness to the whole world, yet write and remember that perfect joy is not in that." When they had gone a little further, "O Brother Leo, even if the Friar

Minor should make the lame walk, straighten the deformed, chase away devils, give light to the blind, and what is a still greater thing, should raise one who had been dead four days, write: perfect joy is not in that." Walking on again a little way, he cried with a loud voice, "O Brother Leo, if the Friar Minor knew all tongues, and all knowledge, and all that has been written; if he could prophesy and reveal not only future events, but the secrets and consciences of souls, write: perfect joy is not in that." And going a little further, S. Francis again cried: "O Brother Leo, God's little lamb, if the Friar Minor spoke the language of the angels, if he knew the course of the stars and the virtues of plants, and if all the treasures of earth were disclosed to him; if he knew the habits of birds, fishes, all animals, and of men, trees, stones, and water, write: perfect joy is not in that." Now, when this discourse had gone on for two miles, Brother Leo, greatly astonished, questioned the Saint, and said, "Father, I pray thee, for God's sake, tell me where is perfect joy to be found?"

And S. Francis answered: "When we get to S. Mary of the Angels,<sup>1</sup> soaked as we are with rain, shivering with cold, covered with mud, and dying of hunger; and when we knock at the door of the convent, and the porter comes out angrily, and asks: Who are you? and we say: We are two of your brothers, and he answers: It is not true; you are two rascals, going round deceiving people and robbing the poor of their alms; be off with you! and when he will not open the door, but leaves us outside in the snow and rain, in cold and hunger, until night; then, if we bear all that injustice, harshness, and refusal, patiently, without murmuring or being troubled, thinking humbly and charitably that the porter really knows us, and that God makes him speak thus against us, O Brother Leo, write: there is

<sup>1</sup> "S. Mary of the Angels." Neither S. Francis nor his contemporaries employed this term. They invariably said, "S. Mary of the Portiuncula." A document using the former expression betrays its origin: it belongs to the fourteenth century. Legend takes the place of history.



perfect joy in that. And if we persist in knocking, and he comes out furiously and drives us away like rogues and impostors, with blows and insults, saying: Away with you, wretched thieves! go to the hospital, for you shall neither eat nor lodge here; and if we bear that with patience, cheerfulness, and love, Brother Leo, write: there is perfect joy. And, if urged by hunger, cold, and darkness, we knock again, calling and begging, with tears, for the love of God that the porter would open the door and give us shelter only; and if he, still more enraged, cries: Impudent rogues! I will pay them as they deserve; and he comes out with a knotted stick, and seizing us by the hood, throws us on the ground, rolling us in the snow, and beating and bruising us with his knotted stick; if we bear all these things with patience and cheerfulness, thinking of the sufferings of the blessed Christ, which we should share for love of Him, O Brother Leo, write: there at last is perfect joy. And now, brother, hear the conclusion: above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ bestows upon His friends, is that of conquering self and bearing willingly all pains, injuries, discomforts, and insults for the love of Christ."

## CHAPTER VI.

### LIFE WITH THE BROTHERS.

AFTER preaching at Assisi, Francis preached in the neighbouring provinces. He announced the word of God "in the towns and fortified places," his biographers tell us. Wherever his growing reputation had preceded him, he was received gladly; but in places where he was entirely unknown, he sometimes had difficulty in making a beginning. At Imola, for instance, the bishop at first answered the request he made very coldly: "My brother, I preach in my own diocese; that is enough." Francis bent his head and went out. An hour later he presented himself again to the bishop. "What have you come for again? what do you want?" asked the latter, sharply. "My lord," replied Francis, "when a father turns his son out of one door, the son has but one thing to do,—to return by another." This child-like confidence won the bishop: "You are right," he said; "you and your brothers may preach in my diocese; I give you a general permission to do so. Your humility deserves nothing less."

This humility was rooted in his most intimate convictions. He would have thought it an offence against God, if, by even justifiable sensitiveness, he had put an obstacle in the way of accomplishing the work that had been intrusted to him. Every day, in proportion as he acquired greater knowledge of men's consciences, this work appeared to him to increase in importance. The reader must have observed that the opening of the thirteenth century was far from giving promise of the splendid growth of holiness that was afterwards to make its greatest glory. "My house is falling to ruin," our Lord had said to His servant, and the

house of which He spoke was indeed the Church He had founded for the shelter of souls. Innocent III., in a dream that was the reflection of his thoughts, had seen the Lateran Church, the mother and mistress of all Churches, tottering from its foundations. The biographers of Francis affirm, in reference to his first apostolic journey, that in those days people had almost forgotten what it was to love God. They enlarge still more upon this when they give the account of his preaching in Italy. According to them, the whole country was covered with thick darkness. Its moral condition might have been compared to those barren, uncultivated fields, where nothing springs up except a few chance seeds. Scarcely any one knew how to direct his life, or set himself on the right way. Such was the spectacle that Francis had before his eyes ; it made such a strong impression on him, that he not only forgot himself, but, like S. Paul, his spirit was stirred within him, and he felt himself drawn onward at the sight of so many cities given to the idolatry of the things of this world.

This was the secret of his eloquence ; it was instigated by compassion and charity. He wished to deliver his brethren from their wretched condition, and he came to them as the apostle of a holier life. With this end in view, he did his best to be acceptable to them, and to persuade them. Amongst the simple he was simple, borrowing his lessons and illustrations from the visible world. His style was more elevated with an educated audience, and then his doctrine became ample and profound. It is asserted that sometimes, with a few rapid touches, he was able to suggest thoughts so sublime that language was incapable of expressing them. His method of oratory added still more to the excellence of his matter. Giving himself up entirely to Him who is the living Truth, he perhaps allowed his discourse to depend a little too much on the inspiration of the moment, without attending to any order in its composition. But all this was compensated by the pleading tones, the passionate gestures, the forcible words which uplifted and animated all who

heard him. At times his whole person seemed to be transfigured, and his audience felt themselves carried away as they listened to him. A physician, who was one of his auditors, and is said to have been an educated man and eloquent himself, thus described the impression left upon him: "I have often remembered whole sermons, but I never could reconstruct one of those of Brother Francis after hearing it. Though some points of it might remain in my memory, I never could find the same beauty in them that had charmed me at first." And the reason of this is, that Francis belonged to the race of true orators. "The flower of his eloquence dropped with the last sound that left his lips."<sup>1</sup>

But the impression that he produced did not vanish. Souls that had once been stirred by him did not fall back again into torpor. They rejoiced to feel the new life throb within them; it was like the dawn of another day arising upon them, and under its vivifying influence they speedily produced fruits of honour and virtue. The operation of grace by the word of S. Francis, in this portion of the Lord's vineyard, resembled what takes place in nature when the sap rises in spring. In less than two years the aspect of the country was changed. Piety had returned to those who had been the coldest. Church festivals, fallen into disuse, were celebrated with religious enthusiasm. Everywhere songs of praise and adoration resounded. Those who were converted wished to bring to the God whom they had found, the homage of their rekindled faith, and God repaid them with contentment and hope.

One of the characteristics of the men of that time is, that when once they had started on the upward path, they never stopped in their course, but went on till they had reached the summit. To this general disposition of mind is due in great measure the rapid development of the Franciscan family. When those who had heard S. Francis preach had

<sup>1</sup> Francis improvised, and he was subject to all the inconveniences that it entails. There were days on which he was below his usual standard, and even some on which he had nothing to say. On these occasions he was not troubled, he blessed the people and departed.—*Cel. ii. p. 60.*



found peace to their souls, they immediately aspired to higher things. Most of them requested to be associated with his life, saying that they were prepared to share in its sacrifices, and that they also desired to labour as much as possible for God. The expressions used by the biographers imply that it was a sort of fascination that was felt by all classes of society. "Rich and poor," they say, "nobles and artisans, learned and ignorant, clerks and laymen, illustrious and obscure men, came in crowds and begged to be admitted. No one was refused." Neither Francis nor his brothers would put any opposition in the way of what they regarded as a manifest action of Divine grace. They opened the path of perfection to all who believed themselves called on to follow it. They never returned to S. Mary of the Portiuncula after preaching, without bringing back with them one or more recruits, whom they had taken as captives for Christ. The monastery soon had to be enlarged to hold the daily increasing numbers who came in.

A greater necessity still was to infuse a uniform spirit into all these postulants. To attain this end in our own days, those desiring to enter a religious Order must pass one or more years in separation and probation, receiving meanwhile, instruction and education for the life they intend to follow. These are the novices, and it is well known that much of the vigour and fervour of the most flourishing communities is attributable to them. At the beginning of the Franciscan Order, however, we find nothing of that kind in existence. What, then, was the secret by which the rapid transformation of so great a number of men was accomplished? This is not by any means the least of the many marvels contained in this wonderful history we are relating, and it requires some notice.

There is but one explanation of it: the strong talent for direction in this Founder of thirty years of age only. The truth is, though it has not been much noticed, that he had all the qualities that go to make an influential master, and, above all, the one perhaps most important, that

of knowing how to speak in private. His warm, sincere heart did not need the excitement of a large audience to draw it out. Where there was a sinner to be saved, or a brother to be led on to higher perfection, his words instantly became full of life and persuasion. Those who are initiated into the secrets of the religious life will understand how valuable this excellent gift was to him. Souls are deeply stirred at the beginning of a vocation. It is seldom that they do not pass through alternate states of excitement and depression, of light and darkness, and from decision to vague hesitation. In such critical moments, Francis was the natural support of his brothers. He took them aside, and calmed or encouraged them by turns: he smoothed away their troubles, and brought back peace to their hearts. According to the fine expression of one of his biographers, he was amongst them like a fountain from whence they could draw life.

Another circumstance that added to the efficacy of his words was that his disciples believed in him. They were persuaded that he was nearer to God than they were, and that in listening to him they heard an echo of the Divine voice. We have already had more than one occasion of verifying this fact. The following instance will illustrate it. Amongst the brethren there was one named Richer, a native of the Marches, of whom we learn only that he was as noble in manners as he was by birth. Whether it was that he had at once entered into the spirit of the Order, or for some other cause, Francis seems not to have given much attention to him. He took no notice of him, and hardly ever spoke to him. The poor brother could not help remarking the conduct of his superior, and felt much hurt by it. He saw him working for everyone and giving encouragement to those who wanted it. Why was he the only one to be neglected? A cruel thought arose in his mind. Perhaps the tenderness of so holy a superior was a test of the Divine tenderness; he even thought that to be reproved by him was almost the same as to be reproved by

God. It must be a secret judgment that thus kept him at a distance. He dared not impart his fears to anyone, and became more and more depressed. For some time he hung about near the cell of Francis, hoping to attract his attention, and at last one day he could bear it no longer, and he decided to go in and see him.

Fortunately, Francis had a gift which, when united to authority, perfects it and makes it an image of God's prescience; he could read what was passing in men's minds. When he saw the brother coming into his cell, he knew at once what had brought him, and with a smiling countenance he went towards him and spared him the trouble of even explaining what he had come for. "It is a temptation, my brother," he said, "believe me, it is a temptation. I have the truest affection for you, and you amongst all others deserve this affection. Come to me whenever you wish it, do not be afraid, let us talk familiarly together;" and they conversed for some time. We can imagine the surprise and joy of Brother Richer. He had, if possible, a still higher idea of his superior after this, and, quite reassured as to his sentiments towards him, he was freed from his misery, and believed that God would be merciful to him, since He had granted him such consolation in this world.<sup>1</sup>

God gives this insight to those who are worthy of it in the order of grace, as well as in that of nature. Francis, by his entire forgetfulness of self, and his constant devotion to those who came to him, was eminently fitted to possess this gift. He loved them with a generous, strong love. They gave him their whole confidence when they put themselves under his discipline, and he felt that he was their debtor in consequence. "Where would be my glory," he

<sup>1</sup> This timid soul, so happily delivered from his fears, became a mystic of a strong and elevated type. He has left a little treatise entitled, "*Qualiter anima possit cito pervenire ad cognitionem veritatis*," of which an eminent theologian has said: "What the author of the '*Imitation*' teaches in the whole course of his book, Richer of the Marches, before him, had rapidly set forth in the same manner in a short pamphlet." P. Cagliardi, quoted by M. l'Abbé Puyol in his learned work, "*La Doctrine de l'Imitation*."

said, "if, after they have lost everything in this world, they were to lose heaven also?" And therefore he was in travail until he had formed them to the life of Jesus Christ. He gave, as we have said, the greater care and solicitude to those who were hesitating, and, after a period of fervour, were stopped by the difficulties they met with, and were inclined to turn back. He considered this one of the most sacred parts of his mission. "A superior," he used to say, "is more of a tyrant than a father if he waits to interfere until a fault has been committed, or a fall has occurred." He did not wait in this way. He was beforehand with the poor brethren, giving them plentiful encouragement, and doing all he could to rekindle their ardour by bringing it into contact with his own. And when he had obtained this happy result, how great was his joy! All true leaders of men have been glad when they saw their sons walking in the truth, but none of them has perhaps expressed his joy so cordially as Francis did. Some years after the time we are speaking of, a Spanish cleric, renowned for his virtue, in passing through Assisi, brought him news of the religious he had established in Spain. "Already," he said, "they are an example of virtue," and in proof of his words he told how one of the brothers, overcome by ecstasy while he was praying, had failed to hear the bell that called them to a repast, and had accused himself for his delay as though it had been a fault, after he came to himself. This simplicity delighted Francis; he cried in a sort of transport, "O God, the guide and sanctifier of the poor, I give Thee thanks for the joy Thou givest me in this moment! Bless, I pray Thee, and enrich with Thy special graces these beloved brethren who are already shedding abroad the good odour of our vocation." One cannot imagine a more truly paternal sentiment than this.

His fatherly care displayed itself in a yet more touching manner on certain occasions, namely, when the brethren, carried away by their zeal, had gone too far, and had, as it were, wounded themselves in the service of God. One night a religious, exhausted with fasting, began groaning and say-



ing, "I am dying of hunger." At the cry of his sheep in distress, Francis, like a good shepherd, rose immediately, and ordered them to bring the best food that was in the refectory, and lest the poor brother should be ashamed to eat alone, he sat down to table with him, and made all the others do the same. When they had eaten, to make charity quite perfect, he gave them a short exhortation on the virtue of discretion. "Formerly," he said, "God commanded that there should be salt in most sacrifices, and the reason of this was symbolical. He gave us to understand that in the voluntary sacrifices which we offer to Him, each one must exactly measure his own strength. It is no less wrong to refuse to the body what is necessary for it, than it is to give it what is superfluous." And he added, "We have been eating a little meal with our brother ; we need not fear that we have failed in temperance. Charity edifies souls, it is never at the service of sensuality." On such occasions—and they were not infrequent in those days of primitive fervour—Francis, who at ordinary times thought the monastery too rich, found its supplies were insufficient. He would then go out, telling the faithful who wanted to help him that one of his brothers was ill and required some delicate kind of food, and as soon as he had received what he desired, he went back carrying the precious gift with him. If, as was often the case, the brother scrupled at eating such luxurious meats, Francis would eat with him, and so free was he from narrow-mindedness, that he would even do so, we are told, if the day happened to be a fast day. Once one of the brothers, who was ill, had a great longing to eat some grapes, doubtless guided by one of those instincts that reveal to the sick what is good for them. He dared not ask for any, but as soon as Francis knew it he went to him, and led him out of the monastery into a vineyard close by. There he gathered some bunches, and, seated on the grass, ate some first himself, and invited the brother to do the same.

Kindness of heart, when it reaches a high state of development, seems to become the mainspring of other virtues.

It induced Francis to give his community what he looked upon as the truest gift of a superior—an example of virtue carried to perfection. In imitation of our Lord, he felt bound to sanctify himself, in order that his own might be sanctified in truth. People sometimes remonstrated with him on the austerity of the life he was leading. He would hardly listen to them, though in general he had great deference for the opinions of others. “Do not stop me,” he said, “I owe an example to the Order. Like the eagle, I must stir up all these little ones to fly in the way of the Divine commands.” Here is the true secret of the mortifications that he practised so generously. In perhaps three or four cases which we shall relate, the mortifications were intended to subdue the beginnings of rebellion, that, to his surprise, he discovered in himself. But he was the first to recognise that, in general, his body, which he sometimes called familiarly “brother ass,” was not disposed to be unsubmitive or restive. “It is a good companion,” he said. It was not then on its own account that he led it so bravely to labour, to efforts, to privations and sufferings; it was for the sake of his brethren. He knew that men look for some one to lead the way, and he said that was his true office. “And he was right,” says one of his historians; “for what subordinates follow in a superior, is much more the hand that they see at work, than the voice which commands or exhorts.”

Such was Francis as a director and master. We can easily believe that he exercised an almost irresistible influence over his followers. When we have said something about the use which he made of this influence, the reader will have a complete idea of the life at the Portiuncula in those early days. We have shown what was his ruling idea. He intended to found a society of men who, desiring to return to the manners of the primitive Church, should profess absolute poverty. A reform of this kind entailed two things. In the first place, the manifold and constantly increasing wants of nature have gradually brought us to pay great attention to these wants, to satisfy them luxuriously in the present,

and to lay up what is necessary for their gratification in the future. Francis had first of all to proscribe this luxury, this thought for the future; in a word, to proscribe riches. Secondly, the more sacrifices we impose on men, the more we are bound to elevate them, for people cannot live entirely on privations; they need mental nourishment for their subsistence; they must have an interior ideal to fortify and console them. Therefore Francis was under obligation to inspire his people with a strong love of their condition, and to make poverty venerable in their eyes for its own sake.

This is how he attained these lofty ends that demand powerful and sustained action for their accomplishment.

He began by exacting an act of magnanimous generosity from all those who offered themselves to him. They must not only bring with them nothing of the goods they had possessed in the world, but he required those goods to be sold, and their product given entirely to the poor. The eldest of his sons, the wealthy Bernard of Quintavalle, had done this, and after him all who aspired to practise in full the evangelical counsels must do the same. Francis was very strict about maintaining this rule. S. Bonaventura tells of a rich man in the Marches of Ancona who had agreed to give up his possessions, but had divided them amongst his relatives instead of devoting them to the poor. Francis would not hear of it. "Go thy way, brother fly," he said, using what with him was a severe expression, "the foundation that thou hast laid is too weak for the edifice thou hast dreamt of; thou art not worthy to become one of Jesus Christ's poor men." And nothing could make him alter his decision. He considered that a man who in such a case stopped to calculate, was of too material a nature, and was incapable of pursuing the perfect road without very soon looking back. He was more willing to make concessions to people of small means, for he was always more attached to the spirit than to the letter. In one of his walks near Assisi he met a young man who was following a plough drawn by two oxen. This man had heard his

sermons, and the divine seed had taken root in his heart ; he wished to embrace the new life. Finding this a favourable occasion, he opened his mind. "I wish you would make me a brother," he said to Francis, "for I want to serve God." "In that case," replied the Saint, "you must abandon what you have and give it to the poor." John (for that was his name) instantly unharnessed the oxen. "I offer you this one," he said, "and we will give the other to the poor." Francis, recognising an upright soul by the frankness of this offer, accepted it, and together they went to the father and mother of the young man. They made many difficulties ; they regretted their son, and they regretted the ox that he had so promptly given away. Francis perceived that this latter regret was no less strong than the former, and he said : "Let us make an arrangement. I will leave you the ox, but I will take away your son," and the proposal was accepted. In this case, a humble peasant would have enriched the Order more than Francis would have permitted a prince to have done.

When once they had relinquished their possessions, the brethren, to continue in their vocation, must persevere in detachment from all things. And this was what Francis especially watched over. He would have thought the commands of God violated, if they had found in the monastery what they had given up on entering it. He wished the Portiuncula to be the perfect kingdom of poverty, and he took care that it should be all that he desired. His historians remark that upon this point he showed a sort of impatience that he never showed on other subjects. If he saw anything that appeared in the smallest degree richer than usual, his brow immediately became clouded. The great effort that he demanded, consisted in entire disappropriation. He was anxious, and suffered at the slightest indication that any one was relaxing in this effort.

His first care was directed to the buildings. He would have preferred to have no buildings at all. "The foxes have their holes," he liked to repeat, "and the birds of the



air their nests ; the Son of Man had not where to lay His head." Since they could not go quite as far as that, he had everything built at the least possible expense. Some beams put together, with earth or sand to fill up the interstices, and branches of trees or planks to close the openings—this was his ideal, and even then he requested that this shapeless mass should be the property of some one outside the community. "Only on this condition," he said, "can we be considered as strangers here below in accordance with the apostolic recommendation." As long as they inhabited the wretched huts they had erected with their own hands round the Portiuncula, he was contented. Certainly no one could accuse them of luxury, and though the Benedictines of Monte Subasio had ceded the chapel and land to them, Francis continued to regard those monks as the rightful owners of both.<sup>1</sup> But as the number of brethren increased, and especially when the Chapters were established, the insufficiency of these primitive shelters became more and more apparent, and their extension became a necessity. All secretly wished for this improvement, but no one would undertake to speak of it to Francis. The town at length came to their assistance. During one of the absences of the holy Founder, at its own expense, it had a building of good proportions quickly erected, commodious, but without any approach to luxury. Great was the surprise and grief of Francis on his return. Full of the indignant zeal that made Moses break the tables of the law, he climbed upon the roof and began tearing off the tiles and loosening the beams ; and, reproaching the brethren, he called on them to join him in demolishing this monument of vanity to its foundations. Fortunately, the town had foreseen this, and watched over its work. Soldiers were sent, who coolly told Francis that the building belonged to the commune, and he was forbidden to do it any injury. He yielded, for even in his excitement

<sup>1</sup> There is a tradition that, in recognition of this right, Francis ordered that each year a little basket of fish, taken in the neighbouring river, should be carried to the Abbot of Monte Subasio.

he was always most respectful to the rights of others, but he yielded with an effort, and it was a long time before he could reconcile himself to an innovation that he had not desired, and yet that he felt was imposed upon him by necessity.

The furniture of the houses was even poorer than the houses themselves. Beds, often consisting of only a little straw, utensils of clay or wood, a few rough tables, and a small number of books common to all the brothers was all that the rooms contained. Francis attached great importance to these details. He was afraid of anything that even distantly approached the luxury of the men of this world. His determination, in the words of one of his biographers, was that everything about them should "express the pilgrim, and should sing of the exile in which they were." He was greatly disturbed if he even imagined that the riches he had banished were creeping furtively in again in little things. At one time that is not indicated, probably towards the end of his life, he was celebrating the festival of Easter at Grecio: the brothers thought it a good idea to prepare a little feast for the body after the soul had been fed. The tables were higher than usual, and covered with a white cloth; the guests had glasses, then considered almost as a luxury. Unfortunately, Francis saw these fine preparations before the repast. He immediately went out of the monastery, unknown to anyone, borrowed the rags of a beggar whom he found at the entrance, and waited, leaning on his stick, until the brethren were in the refectory. In due time he appeared at the door. "My good brothers," he cried, "for the love of God give alms to a poor man." "Come in, good man," they answered, "come in for the love of Him whom you invoke," and Francis entered. We can imagine the stupefaction of the brethren when they recognised him. He would not give up the part he had begun to play. He asked for a little wooden bowl, which they gave him, and he went and sat on the ground, putting the bowl in the ashes. "At least," he said severely, "I shall be seated as a Friar Minor ought to be seated." In this humble posi-

tion he made his frugal meal, then, softening a little, he said : " Do not forget, dear brethren, that the example of poverty the Son of God has left must be more binding on us than on other religious. When I saw that well-appointed table, I could not recognise the beggars who go from door to door." The lesson was understood. Francis, like the divine pilgrim of Emmaus, had, in manifesting himself, opened the eyes and touched the hearts of his disciples.<sup>1</sup>

As to clothes, we have seen to what he had reduced them. But he was far from thinking his point gained when he had obliged his disciples to wear serge. He knew that a certain kind of vanity may lurk even beneath rags, and he was always on the watch, and became severe and cutting in his remarks if he saw the least token of anything fine. " It is an infallible sign," he said, " that fervour is cooling in a soul. They only seek sensual delights who no longer relish spiritual ones." He himself gave the example by wearing but one tunic, and that usually a patched one, in every season. He never allowed his disciples to have more than two. " It may be that one suffers a little," he said, " but what sort of virtue is that which cannot suffer something? To try and avoid all mortifications under the plea of necessity is a cowardly way of losing occasions of merit ; it is what the Hebrews would have done had they gone back to Egypt." A very strong case of necessity, therefore, had to be proved before he would authorise any relaxation. He allowed those who suffered too much from cold, to add some strips of stuff to their tunics to make them warmer. To the sick he permitted the use of softer materials, but only for underclothing ; the tunic was always to be made of rough, coarse stuff. " All vigour will have departed from the Order," he repeated sadly ; " there will be universal tepidity the day on which my children, the children of a poor father, begin to use the rich tissues of the worldlings."

<sup>1</sup> In the Middle Ages the language of action was often employed. There was then an instinctive taste for the picturesque. Our uniform manners have rather an opposite tendency, but that should not prevent us from understanding those who have preceded us.

But still more than riches of that kind he hated what may be called artificial riches, namely, money. The nature of money is to accumulate insensibly, and then suddenly bursting forth into opulence, it becomes a means of deterioration to the character. For this reason Francis feared it as much as he did the devil, and in fact, it seemed as though he thought the devil was in it. They must not have any, even by proxy; no one might even touch it, it was to be trodden under foot; such was the law he made. More than one temptation on this subject came to the brethren, and sometimes the temptation was very insidious. At the beginning of the Order, a layman, who had been at his devotions in S. Mary of the Portiuncula, left a sum of money at the foot of the crucifix. A brother who came there after him, saw the money and threw it on the window, either in disdain, or with a remnant of esteem for a thing, the value of which he understood, or it might have been for both these reasons. But he had touched the coins in spite of the prohibition, and Francis took his act very ill. He sent for him and lectured him in presence of all the brothers, then ordered him, for penance, to take the money between his lips and carry it out of the monastery and throw it on the first dung that he came to on the road. Francis made an example of the poor brother. Like most founders, he took the opportunity of giving prominence in a notable manner to a rule that he considered essential. The singularity of the lesson was calculated to impress it on their minds; they would know that for the future money was to be looked upon as dung. Once indeed, at a later period, Francis permitted an exception to this absolute rule. His heart was wounded at the sight of the sick brethren. In the second of his Rules he wrote, that in a case of necessity they might receive a little money for their relief; but he soon repented of this indulgence, and went back to his first severity in the definite rule, dying with the conviction that it was essential to close up every passage by which the most redoubtable enemy of the Order might gain an entrance.



But the brothers must subsist, and since money was forbidden, and all possessions were relinquished, there were but two methods of providing for their subsistence—work, remunerated in kind, and alms, solicited from the faithful. Francis inculcated both, but especially the former. The title, Mendicant Order, has sometimes been the cause of an illusion; people have supposed that mendicity was the habitual resource of the religious. The Will of S. Francis expressly states the contrary. "All the brothers who have learnt a trade will exercise it," it says; "those who have not, must learn one and keep to the exercise of it without changing. All will receive everything necessary for the support of life, except money, in remuneration of their work." And so they worked at the Portiuncula. The idle were not allowed to stay there very long. A brother came who ate a great deal, and would not do anything. Francis sent him away ignominiously. "Go thy way, brother fly; thou art only a drone in our hive." The holy Founder himself set an example. Though the direction of the Order and his constant preaching prevented him from having an habitual trade, he willingly set his hand to some work, that his spare moments might not be lost. Once during Lent he carved a vase, probably of wood. We can imagine that his strong instinct for beauty enabled him to succeed in giving it an artistic form that was some kind of satisfaction to himself. One day while he was reciting Tierce, he began to think of it, and for a moment forgot that he was praying. The unfortunate vase was instantly condemned. "Would you believe," he said to his brothers, "that this trifle had power enough over me to distract my mind? Since it has interrupted the sacrifice of praise that I was offering to the Lord, I shall sacrifice it to Him." And he threw the too greatly loved work into the fire. Who does not admire this resolution of the Saint to let nothing interpose itself between God and him? and yet we cannot but feel regret for the beautiful vase, fashioned by those venerable hands, which for so many

reasons might have been one of the most precious monuments of the Italian Renaissance had it been preserved to us!

"When the brethren are in want of the necessities of life, they shall go and ask for alms like other poor men." Thus the rule was expressed. Now at that time, when labour in general lacked both organisation and outlet, days of complete destitution must have been frequent in a large community. Francis, in his heart, was glad of them. He had often begged during the long period while his vocation was forming, and he would have thought his followers missed something if they were nothing but industrious workmen. Begging seemed to him the complement of true poverty. The brothers found some difficulty in receiving this doctrine. After the twelve first, several had joined, who either from birth or disposition, felt extreme repugnance to the part of a beggar. Francis, who was as gentle as he was firm, would not force them. He began by undertaking the ignominious office alone, but at the same time he tried to recommend it to them by encouraging words. "My beloved brethren," he said, "the Son of God was far more noble than the noblest of us; and yet He became poor upon earth. It is for love of Him that we have embraced poverty, therefore we must not be ashamed to resort to the table of our Lord"—he often spoke of alms in this way—"for when we resort to that divine table we take a pledge of the inheritance that awaits us. I have told you: many noblemen and sages who will glory in the title of Mendicants, will join you. Rejoice, then, to give good examples to those brethren whose first fruits you are, that they may in future have nothing to do but to follow you." At other times he allowed that no one can beg without feeling shame; "but," he added, "it is not a fault to have a brow that blushes easily, it is rather an occasion of merit, if we triumph over this excessive delicacy, and instead of being turned back by it, persevere generously to the end." Finally, he was certain that the Minors had been given to the world for the sake of the

elect. "All that you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done it unto me." "You hear," he said, "to the least, *minoribus*. The Divine Prophet foretold us. We fulfil a benevolent mission towards those who assist us." These exhortations, frequently repeated, had their effect. The brothers found that they could not resist any longer. The memory of one has been preserved who went out to perform this difficult task, and accomplished it so thoroughly and cheerfully that on his way back he began singing a hymn with a loud voice. When Francis heard him he ran to meet him, saying, "Blessed be my brother, who started with decision, begged with humility, and returns full of joy," and he relieved him of his wallet, and kissed his shoulder in the place on which it had rested.

This graciousness in austerity was one of the young Founder's secrets. It doubtless came partly from an amiable disposition, but it had another and a higher origin. Francis made an ideal of poverty that was not only a light to himself, but had moreover a great influence on his work. It is time that we make mention of it. He not only regarded poverty as one of the great virtues taught by the Gospel, and as one that corresponded to the wants of the day, though these considerations had great weight with him, but his favourite conception of it, if not truer, was at least more tender and poetical. We have alluded to chivalry in connection with his former desire of becoming a knight. One of the chief features of that institution, or rather Order,—for it was a sort of lay Order, the Order of Chivalry, as it was called—was devotion to woman. It was the custom for every knight to choose from amongst the noblest ladies one who became his lady, whose colours he wore in public, in whose presence he lived, and from whom, in the hour of battle, he asked for inspiration, aid, and success, as though from God Himself. This was the attitude that Francis took in regard to poverty. He personified it, in the spirit of those times when symbolism was in such esteem, and he loved to adorn it

with all the graces that the troubadours attributed to the ladies they sang of. In his eyes, poverty was a queen. Her union with our Lord and His Holy Mother, had conferred on her this dignity, and his respect for her was heightened by the fact of her being a deposed queen, and the victim of unjust contempt. Let not the reader smile as though we were entering into the domain of pure poetry. The following prayer, habitually used by S. Francis, shows what loving and passionate religion lay hid beneath these fictions: "O Lord, have pity on me and on my lady Poverty. Behold she is seated on a dunghill, she who is the queen of virtues, she complains that her friends have despised her and are become her enemies.<sup>1</sup> Remember, O Lord, that Thou didst come from the abode of angels to take her as spouse, and to have by her great numbers of children who should be perfect. It was she who received Thee in the stable and the manger, accompanied Thee through life, and took care that Thou hadst not where to lay Thy head. When Thou wert about to begin the warfare of our redemption, Poverty attached herself to Thee like a faithful squire; she kept beside Thee during the combat, nor retreated when others fled. Finally, when Thy Mother, who indeed followed Thee to the end and shared in all Thy sorrows, yet by reason of the height of the cross, could not reach Thee, at that moment Poverty embraced Thee more closely than ever. She would not let Thy cross be carefully prepared, nor the nails be sufficient in number, or sharp and polished; she provided but three, and made them hard and rough, the better to fulfil the intention of Thy torture. And when Thou wert dying of thirst, she took care that even a drop of water should be refused Thee, so that it was in the embrace of that spouse that Thou gavest up Thy spirit. Oh! who, therefore, would not love my lady Poverty above all things?"

<sup>1</sup> I think this is the only allusion Francis has made to the feudal wealth of the Church. No one was less aggressive than he. He belonged to the high class of reformers. He corrected abuses by holding up an ideal, which, when once it was loved, caused them to disappear as the darkness before the sun.



As to Francis, he loved her with his whole heart. Whenever, as in this prayer, he thought of her as the spouse, or rather, in Dante's words, the desolate widow, of Jesus Christ, his love was tempered by veneration, and he called her his mother, or his lady. At other times, says S. Bonaventura, he experienced a more tender sentiment, and he ventured to give her the name of bride. It was under that aspect that she had appeared to him in his first dreams of the future, and afterwards he thought himself more and more the object of her tenderness, till at length he was so taken by her beauty, that his spirit became one with her, and, his historians say, there was "no moment in his life in which he did not feel himself her bridegroom." And like a true bridegroom he showed her all attentions. He delighted in her company, and, as Dante says,

"Their concord and their joyous semblances,  
The love, the wonder, and the sweet regard,  
They made to be the cause of holy thoughts."

(Dante, "Par.," xi. 76, Longfellow's translation).

He avoided everything that could shock her; for instance, when admitted to the table of the great, that he might not be unfaithful to her for even a moment, he always provided himself with bread that had been begged for, and that he called the bread of angels. He liked to celebrate her praises. Sometimes he would speak of the rich dowry that she holds in reserve: "It is not," he said, in the language of the time, "a movable and revocable fief, it is a permanent heritage, a kingdom." Sometimes he made verses in her honour, and in reciting the breviary, when he came to the psalms which speak of her, he sang them with increased animation. The 9th Psalm, *Confitebor tibi*, and the 68th, *Salvum me fac, Deus*, are said to have been his special favourites on this account. And he, who had never known what it was to be jealous of any one, was jealous of her. One day he met a poor man whose rags were scarcely sufficient to cover him; Francis thought directly that this

beggar was more favoured than he : " Ah ! my brother," said he to his companion, " that man troubles and confounds me." " Why so ? " replied this one. " What," he answered, " have we not publicly embraced Poverty ? Throughout the land she is known to be our wealth and our lady : now, behold, how much more she shines and shows herself in him than in us ! " And there were tears in his voice as he uttered these words.

It would be a great misconception however, to see only the effect of imagination in this spirit of the Saint. In the Middle Ages, a vein of poetry, provided the idea it contained was a high one, did not in the least detract from the sincerity or even from the austerity of a man's sentiments. This was eminently the case with Francis. Were a proof of the fact necessary, we have it in the severe maxims that the most rigorous ascetic would not despise, which are to be found side by side with this poetical symbolism. Amongst others is the following, afterwards borrowed by the author of the " Imitation " : " If we will enter into the power of the Lord, we must offer ourselves naked to the naked arms of the Crucified." A still more convincing proof to the historian is the wonderful ascendancy that he exercised. In the government of men there must be a sense of reality and a certainty of action which do not harmonise with chimeras. Now, Francis was not only a beloved and respected guide, but he had the power of imparting his own enthusiasm to his disciples, and what is the highest praise of all, he was able to content them, while requiring from them the greatest sacrifices.

This chapter, dedicated to the glory of the Master, may well close with a picture of this good-will in his disciples, a picture that has been traced by the historians of Francis in two instances with a liveliness and reality that leave nothing to be desired. " Happy in being together," say the Three Companions, " in the sweetness of their union they forgot the ill-treatment of perverse men. Each day they gave themselves to prayer and manual labour ; their great endeavour was to avoid idleness, that powerful enemy of the

soul. They rose at midnight and prayed very devoutly, often with tears and sighs. They loved one another with tender affection, and mutually assisted each other with such eagerness and disinterestedness, that a mother could not show greater attention to a beloved and only child. They looked upon it as a light thing to give their life, not only for love to the Lord Jesus, but for the salvation of the soul or body of their brethren. As two of them were walking together one day, they met a madman, who began to throw stones at them. Immediately one of them put himself forward to screen the other, willing, on account of the charity that reigned in their hearts, rather to be struck himself than to let his brother be attacked. They were so thoroughly grounded in humility that each one respected his brother as though he were his father and his lord, and those who were highest in rank, or were distinguished in any way, were the first to put themselves beneath the others. Their only ambition was to obey; they submitted themselves so completely to their superior, that they never considered whether he had or had not the right to give a command; they regarded his orders as coming from God Himself, and it was their greatest happiness to perform them. They had a horror of all carnal desires, and judged themselves severely, and they were most careful not to be a burden upon one another. If one of them, inadvertently, had spoken a sharp word, he felt such regret afterwards that he could not rest till he had confessed his fault, and, humbly prostrated on the ground, had prevailed on the one he had mortified to put his foot on his mouth. Such a request was often refused, and then, if the culprit were in authority, he ordered him whom he had offended not to persevere in his refusal; or, if he was a simple brother, he asked the superior to give the order. By these practices, they banished all rancour and bad feeling from their society, and maintained true and perfect charity, knowing the secret of opposing vice with virtue by the help and grace of the Lord.

“They had nothing of their own; the books, and in

general everything contained in the monastery, was for the use of all, as in the apostolic times. Though their poverty was extreme, they found means to be generous, giving to everyone, especially to those who were in need, of what had been given to them. If they had nothing else left when they met some poor man on the road who asked alms of them, they would present him with part of their miserable garments. Sometimes a hood, a sleeve, or some other piece would be separated from a tunic in fulfilment of the words of the Gospel: 'Give to him that asketh of thee.' Their charity was extended to the rich also. They gave a cordial welcome to any who came to them, and spared no pains to withdraw them from sin, and to lead them to repentance. As to themselves, their great wish was not to be sent to their native places, for they desired by this separation from those who were dear to them, to be conformed to the words of the prophet: 'I am become a stranger to my brethren and an alien to the sons of my mother.' They gloried in being poor, and set no value either on riches or on any perishable things. But it was on money that they poured the greatest contempt; they treated it like dung, according to the instructions of Francis. Their joy was continual, for nothing either within or without them could in any way sadden them. The more they were detached from the world, the closer they felt their union with God. Thus they walked on the way of the Cross and the paths of justice, putting aside every obstacle to salvation, and opening a direct and certain road for those who should come after them."

Thomas of Celano perhaps lays more stress on the fraternal affection of those primitive times. "The new disciples of Christ," he says, "had but one heart and one soul. No envy, malice, suspicion, or rancour was to be found amongst them. Never was a bad or bitter word to be heard. They loved each other, lived in peace, praised God, and gave thanks. Their greatest happiness was in being together, and when obedience obliged them to accept some mission,



and they were separated for a time, they longed for the hour when they should be reunited. And what joy there was when that hour came ! Then cheerful countenances were to be seen, the holy kiss was given, there were conversations full of animation, and eagerness to perform good offices for one another. It was the happiness of brothers who meet again, and have the pleasure of knowing that they are going to live together once more." The historian notices many of the characteristics mentioned by the Three Companions, and concludes : All this joy, enthusiasm, and virtue came from Francis ; " he, like a father to whom his children give heed, had formed this family by his word, his lessons, and in all sincerity and truth, by his work and his example."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SECOND ORDER.

A GREAT joy had come to Francis during the time of which we have been speaking. A young girl of good birth, who had heard him preach at S. Rufinus, came and told him that not only had she understood his work, but that she felt herself strongly drawn—by God, she thought—to walk in his steps. It is the glory of women that they have always taken an active part in all the great movements that have done honour to Christianity. “Let us make man a help like unto himself,” God said when He created her, and, at least since the coming of Jesus Christ, she has fulfilled the object for which she was made. In heroic acts, holy enterprises, difficult reformatations, she has been found ready for all things. Emulating man, and often equalling him, she has ever been at his side, encouraging him with her sympathy, and, if need were, sustaining him by her example. This help, the divine goodness was preparing for Francis, and we will now relate under what a gracious aspect it came to him.

S. Clara was born at Assisi in 1194, a little more than twelve years after S. Francis. By her father, Favorino Scefi or Scifi, as well as by her mother, who was of the house of Fiumi, she belonged to the best families of the city. From her first years the child seemed as if pre-destined. Her piety began with the dawn of reason. It was as though a happy instinct made her seek and find Him who had created her, and goodness of heart was hers from her birth. She delighted in giving, and, that she might have more to give, she took from her own meals, and distributed the food she thus saved, or had it distributed by

the servants, to the poor. She early showed great strength of will, and what is more rare, she knew how to be mistress over that will. She subdued it by mortifications, and, it is said, went so far as to wear a little hair-cloth under her childish garments. These qualities increased with her years, and as she grew up to maidenhood, the fame of virtue was already shed around her. The people loved to consider her as one of the ornaments of their town. Her parents dreamt of an establishment for her that should correspond to these rich promises and to their own station in life. But for some time past, God had been inclining the heart of the young patrician to another future.

She was accustomed to hear the name of Francis spoken of with respect. The praises of the servant of God were on every lip. People said he was a new, an extraordinary man. They forestalled history, and declared that he would be the restorer of virtue and the reformer of those stormy times. Clara, naturally full of intelligence, and possessing the divine gift of love for the things of God, could not but partake in this general admiration. And not only did she partake in it, but having, like all her companions, heard Francis preach in the cathedral, the grandeur of his thoughts, and the greatness of his design, took strong hold upon her mind. It seemed evident to her that here was an undertaking in the success of which the whole world was interested, and sometimes, as she meditated on it, she imagined that somehow, she knew not in what manner, a part would be given her in this great work, and that she would aid in its progress. At first she kept these ideas to herself, hardly daring to give any importance to them; then when she found her mind constantly and involuntarily drawn in that direction, she thought it was a divine impulse, and she desired to consult him who appeared to her as her natural guide under those circumstances.

She had no difficulty in finding an opportunity to speak to Francis. He had heard of her through public report, and besides this, as we have seen, a cousin of hers, Brother

Rufinus, was at the Portiuncula, and held in much esteem by the Saint for his refinement of character. Under the pretext of a visit to this relative, Clara, accompanied by one of her household, went in reality to see Francis, and he afterwards returned her visit at her father's house, probably taking Brother Rufinus with him; and thus they met several times. The more they saw of each other, the more convinced they were that their meeting had been ordered by God. Clara was never tired of listening to Francis, whose eloquence was the same whether he was conversing in private or speaking to a crowd, and whose words, while they penetrated her soul, filled it with a divine and blessed light. Francis, on his side, was delighted with all he found in her; her sincerity, her simple courage ready for all sacrifices, and, more than all, her faith in a call from heaven; all these were characteristics of a soul bidden to the marriage of the Divine Spouse. And Clara's was manifestly one of those souls; she must be offered to the Lord speedily, as noble prey that the world would before long strive to possess.

How to effect this required some deliberation. Clara's mother, Ortolana, was a truly pious woman, and had been led by devotion to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land and to Mount Gargano; but, even with her approval, Clara did not think she would ever obtain her father's consent. Francis, who remembered his own troubles at the beginning of his vocation, would not expose a young girl to the trial of a direct contest with her family. The situation was a most delicate one. After reflecting on it, he could see but one resource, the same that he had himself employed: a bold step, which, by removing her from her father, would give her the advantage over him of having already accomplished part of what she desired to do. Clara assured him that, for God's sake, she was prepared to go thus far; but Francis seems to have hesitated at taking upon himself alone such a heavy responsibility. He very wisely judged that the intervention of the Bishop of Assisi was necessary.

That prelate, after consideration, and, doubtless, after



having examined Clara, approved the plan, and all uncertainty was at an end. It was arranged that Clara should secretly quit her father's house on the night of Palm Sunday, March 19th, 1212, which was now approaching. When the day came, Clara, dressed, by the advice of Francis, in her finest fête-day clothes, went with her family to the cathedral of Assisi. The office began, but Clara was so absorbed by her thoughts, that at the moment when, according to the custom of the time, the priests and the faithful advanced in turn to the altar to receive a palm, she saw nothing of what was going on, and remained in her place. The Bishop, who was officiating, perceived her absence. Either he feared that it was caused by a moment of hesitation, and he wished, by a striking emblem, to encourage her not to relinquish the victory, or perhaps he intended to give a sort of consecration beforehand to the great work the young girl was about to attempt; however it may have been, the fact is, that when the distribution of palms was ended, he was seen descending the steps of the sanctuary, and to the great astonishment of those present, he placed in Clara's hands the branch that she had not come to fetch herself.

On the following night Clara went out of the house with some attendants, an honourable suite, her biographer says. The great door was guarded, and she dared not attempt it, but slipped out by a postern, after pulling up the stakes that closed it. Having passed this, below in the valley, through the shadows of night, she could perceive the little chapel of the Portiuncula. Thither she ran, with the swiftness of a dove escaping from the hands of the fowler and returning to its nest. The brethren, warned by Francis, were waiting for her, while they recited matins. As she drew near they went out to meet her, carrying lighted tapers in their hands, and, singing hymns they led her into their beloved sanctuary. The sacrifice of the noble victim began at once. After a few words, full of emotion, Francis cut off her hair, clothed her in a garment of ash-coloured

stuff, girded her with a cord, and covered her head with a thick veil. Then Clara knelt before the image of Mary, and, with a firm voice, pronounced the vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. It was all done. Whatever might happen in the future, she belonged irrevocably to God. By profession and habit, as well as in soul and thought, she had become the humble sister of him whom she so highly venerated. Her heart overflowed with joy. Francis left her a few moments to these sweet considerations, and then, feeling that no time must be lost, he took some of the brethren, and they conducted her to the banks of the Chiascio, two miles distant, to the monastery of the Benedictine nuns of S. Paul. Thus the daughters of S. Benedict, by receiving Clara, did for the second Order what his sons had done for the first: they sheltered its first-fruits and its hope.

The next day Clara's parents arrived at the monastery, and, in the picturesque words of S. Antoninus, there arose a warm battle of words. The father spoke of his violated authority, the mother of her ill-requited tenderness, and both of the compromise to the dignity of their house. They entreated, pressed, ordered their child to return home. The new spouse of the Lord bore this attack without flinching. At first she tried to make them understand her conduct; then, finding she did not succeed, and that her father would soon become exasperated and have recourse to violence, she rose and went quickly into the chapel, clung to the altar and the linen that draped it, and, uncovering her shorn head, she protested that no one should tear her away from the living God to whom she was consecrated. Her parents, struck by so much nobility and firmness, dared not go further; they retired, and, what was most unexpected, they promised never more to trouble their child.

They were far from thinking that the sword of the Lord, that irresistible sword which separates children from their parents, was unsheathed against their house, and that within a few days they were to undergo a second bereavement.

Clara, for some unknown reason, had been moved from the convent of S. Paul to another Benedictine house, S. Angelo di Panzo, situated on Monte Subasio. A fortnight after the scenes we have described, her youngest sister, a girl of fourteen, brave-hearted as she was herself, and loving Clara with an almost religious devotion, fled from the paternal mansion, and came and knocked at the door of the monastery. Her arrival was not altogether unexpected. Clara warmly returned the love her young sister gave her. She knew her strength of mind, and she foresaw that she would be a valuable support to her. Since her own consecration she had incessantly prayed God to send her as an auxiliary in her need, and she welcomed her with open arms. "Ah! sweetest sister!" she cried, "how I bless God that He has so quickly heard the earnest prayer I made to Him for thee!" Agnes, for that was the young girl's name, on her side declared that she had no hesitation, and that she had come intending never to leave her. Cheered by the happiness of being together, the two sisters prepared to face the storm that was certain to burst upon them.

And it was a terrible storm. The biographer of the Saint has drawn a picture of it which vividly expresses the rudeness of those times. We will reproduce it: "At the news of Agnes being with her sister, twelve men of her family went to the monastery. Rage was in their hearts, though they hid their evil designs under a peaceful exterior. But presently, addressing Agnes (they hoped nothing from Clara), they said: 'Why have you come here? Make ready to return to your father with us.' And, when she replied that she would never leave Clara, one of them, losing patience, fell upon her with kicks and blows. He seized her by the hair and tried to drag her away, while the others pushed her and lifted her in their arms. Snatched by these lions from the arms of the Lord, the poor young girl cried: 'Ah! my beloved sister, come and help me, let me not be carried away from my Lord.' And while the ravishers were

dragging her down the slope of the mountain, tearing her clothes in the struggle, and strewing the way with her hair, Clara, bathed in tears, prostrated herself before the altar of the Lord. She prayed that her sister might remain firm, and that the wickedness of those men might be arrested by a power greater than their own. And behold, suddenly the young girl's body became so heavy that it seemed as though it were rooted to the ground, and several men with all their efforts could not succeed in carrying her over a stream they had come to. Some peasants, working in the vineyards hard by, came to their assistance, nor could they either uplift her from the earth. Exhausted with their efforts, they began making jokes on the miracle. 'She must have been eating lead all night,' they said, 'and that is why she is so heavy.' One of her paternal uncles named Monaldo, in a fit of rage, was about to put an end to her. He raised his hand to strike her, when he was seized with a sudden acute pain which stopped him short and gave him much suffering for some time afterwards. The struggle had continued too long. At length Clara came. She reproached her relatives for treating a child in this way till they had half killed her, and entreated them to restore Agnes to her care. Not knowing what more to do, they yielded to her representations, and retired much disappointed at their failure. Agnes then arose, joyful at having gained this first victory for Jesus Christ, and more determined than ever to consecrate herself to this Divine Spouse." When Francis heard of what had happened, he judged that such a marked intervention of heaven pleaded in her favour, and he dispensed with the delay that her tender age would otherwise have required. At the end of a few days he cut off her hair, and gave instructions to her and to Clara in the ways of perfection. Now all their bonds were broken. The two sisters belonged entirely to God and to each other, and they tasted fully all the sweetness of this state. But there was still something wanting. Though they were well cared for in the convent, they felt themselves only guests in a strange



house, and they longed for the time when they could be definitely fixed and could have liberty to develop and advance in the way their spirit led them. Francis entirely shared in their desire, and he thought he knew the place that the Providence of God destined to them. This, as we before hinted, was the little sanctuary of S. Damian that he had so piously restored with his own hands. But before they could be established there, it was necessary to obtain the consent of the canons of Assisi, for they were the proprietors of the place. He hastened to solicit this consent, and it was granted without difficulty. A few arrangements were quickly made, and then he brought in Clara and Agnes. The two sisters immediately "cast there the anchor of their soul," as in a soil already prepared for them, and from that moment they knew no more anxiety or desire for change.

Their vocation, even after the marvellous vocation of Francis and his first companions, made a great noise in the country. Their rank, their youth, the courage they had shown, were the subjects of general admiration. At the same time, poverty, since it was embraced by such delicate natures, seemed to lose something of its rigour. To a great number of women it seemed like the royal road by which our Lord, in the then state of the Church, was calling those hearts who truly desired to serve him. In the words of S. Clara's biographer, there arose amongst them an emulation in sacrifice. It was as though virtue was shown to them then for the first time. Those who were bound by sacred domestic ties applied themselves to living in a more holy manner than they had done before. Others left their families and came and joined Clara. She had the happiness of counting amongst the number of those who first came, several young girls whom she had loved in the world. After a few years, she had the still greater joy of receiving her youngest sister Beatrice, and finally, what must have seemed to her the complete justification of her conduct, her mother Ortolana, who, becoming a widow, hastened to bid adieu to the world

and rejoin her daughters. In consequence of this eagerness to follow the example of the two sisters, S. Damian soon contained the family. The second Order was founded. The humble monastery was shortly to become the hive that, blessed by heaven, was to send forth like bees the pious virgins who were to carry the spirit of self-denial and poverty throughout Europe.

It was only at the end of three years, and after repeated injunctions from Francis, that Clara consented to take the title of abbess, but from the beginning, by her example and the rare qualities with which she was endowed, she was the light and soul of the new community. One of her first cares was to mark distinctly the end that she and her companions had in view. She desired that even to the name by which they were designated, it should be made clear to every one that they extended to their own sex the same reform that Francis had set before the men. The title of *Poor Ladies* seemed to her to fulfil this object, but she did not think herself justified in assuming it without authorisation from the Holy See. It was impossible for her to go in person to Rome, as Francis had done, so she wrote the Sovereign Pontiff a letter full of enthusiasm and decision, expressing her design, and begging, as a privilege, to be allowed to take the name as well as the livery of poverty. Innocent III. still governed the Church, though his end was not far distant. He at once recognised the spirit of Francis in a petition whose tone was such a contrast to that of ordinary supplications. "Ah! that is a privilege," he cried, "that has never yet been solicited from the Holy See." And with a joyful impulse he seized a pen, and, adding an unusual favour to an unusual request, he wrote with his own hand the first words of the Brief by which he granted her what she asked for.

Clara soon had an opportunity of showing that the title she had coveted was not a vain one. She was the eldest of her sisters. The premature death of her father without a male heir put her in possession of all his goods. It was a very

rich inheritance, but Clara would not allow the smallest part of it to enter the monastery. Everything was sold by auction, at her command, and the large sums of money that resulted from these sales were distributed amongst the poor. Thus a new lesson was given to that feudal society that based itself entirely upon wealth. It was taught, by a striking example, that there were some amongst its highest members who, far from putting their trust in such support and advantages as it afforded, were willing, for the love of God, to reduce themselves to the state of destitution compared by our Lord to that of the birds of the air.

The heavenly Father provided for the wants of his new children in the beginning especially, by means of the charity of the faithful. The holy want of forethought, or rather the simple confidence of Clara, had touched all hearts. Her fellow-citizens made it a duty to show her that her faith in God, and a little faith in them also, had not been groundless. They willingly brought to the monastery all the necessaries of life for the religious. But soon, as is always the case, this ardour began to cool, and it was necessary to go to the houses to excite the charity which came less frequently of its own accord. The sisters, most of them young, could not do this in person. They employed, therefore, what we now call lay sisters, and the biographers simply named as servants, *famulæ*. A pretty anecdote has revealed to us the existence of these good sisters. Clara, faithful to the spirit of S. Francis, always treated them with delicate respect. She liked to receive them herself, and to wash their feet when they returned to the convent laden with their burdens. One day, when she had fulfilled this pious office for one of them, she wished to kiss the feet she had just washed. The humble woman, perceiving what she was about to do, tried to prevent it. She drew her foot away quickly, just as Clara's lips were approaching it, and she did it so awkwardly that she struck her lady in the face. Clara did not show the least emotion. She gently took

hold again of the foot that had escaped her, and kissed it on the sole for a long time.

This is what Clara made of S. Damian. The divine spirit that possessed Francis possessed her also. Women joined in the battle like men for the integrity and honour of poverty. But neither sex made the austere virtue the final goal of their lives. Their theory was that poverty, by stripping us of externals, shows us as we really are, and, while shaping our lives, increases our strength tenfold; but they were aware that these enlarged powers require an object, and what other object could there be except the eternal truth for which we have been made—namely, Jesus Christ, in whom this divine truth is presented to us? Therefore to lead souls to Christ, to teach them to know and love Him better, was a work incumbent on them, if they desired fully to accomplish their mission. Clara understood the wide extent of this obligation.

She wished to have the bread of the divine word abundantly served to the sisters. She herself listened to pious discourses with a kind of avidity. Her biographer says that well composed sermons and those of cultivated preachers were her great delight, though she herself was illiterate. To her, and to the community, these were their great treats; but for all this, they did not despise instructions of a simpler kind. "We must be able to find flowers amongst thorns, as well as on the most beautiful plants," said Clara, and she herself was skilful in seeking and discovering fruit where it lay hidden by the inexperience of the preacher. With these dispositions, all sermons were welcome at S. Damian, and so many were preached here, that at last one day the affectionate solicitude of the Pope, Gregory IX., was aroused. He feared, and in this Francis agreed with him, that these frequent visits of the brothers would insensibly alter the spirit of the two houses. Therefore, to avert this danger, he forbade under severe penalties any of the religious of the Portiuncula to go to S. Damian without an express commission from the Holy See. Clara felt this unexpected



blow acutely. She submitted, but not without giving evidence of how cruel she considered this measure. Besides the lay sisters of whom we have spoken, the convent had at its service some of the brothers, whose duty it was to seek for supplies at the more distant places. Clara called them together, and, having thanked them for the past, she made known to them that from henceforth she would trust entirely to the direct intervention of Providence. "Since they have taken away from us those who brought us the bread of the soul," she exclaimed, "let them do away with those who begged for us the bread for our bodies." The generous heart of Gregory IX. saw in this somewhat hasty decision, nothing of discontent or murmuring ; he recognised the complaint of a mother bound to nourish those who have been given to her, and with marvellous condescension he retracted his prohibition and gave back to the monastery the preachers that were so dear to it.

While claiming them as auxiliaries whom she needed, Clara did not forget that the chief part of the work belonged to her, nor had she any wish to escape from this responsibility. She loved to look upon herself as a governess in the palace of a great king charged with the education of the princesses, and she devoted her principal care to this office. Her instructions seem to have been abundant and varied. She taught her pupils to silence the vain tumults and disturbances within their hearts. "Union with truth is only to be had at this price," she said ; "it is given only to recollected silent souls to penetrate into the sanctuary where God dwells and is heard to speak." She spoke in magnificent terms of the state of a soul governed by reason : "that soul alone is free and is a queen ; up to that time, it obeyed servilely the exigences of the body and the childish caprices of the flesh." Finally, she put them on their guard against the snares which the devil holds in readiness for souls who seek spiritual light. "The temptations of people in the world are of one kind, those of Saints are of another," she said, and amongst the most

insidious temptations of the latter she specified the sudden collapse of the will, the dissipation of interior sentiments and thoughts, false self-satisfaction, vague and unreasonable sadness. This latter was perhaps the temptation she most feared. She could not rest if she knew that one of her daughters was attacked by it. Taking the poor sufferer aside, she sympathised with her and mingled her tears with hers. If necessary, she would do even more than this ; she would kneel before her and lavish the tenderest, most maternal caresses on her, doing all in her power to soften the heart that was inclined to be hardened by sorrow, that hope might revive with returning tenderness and bring with it its own peculiar property, without which there can be no virtue, energy, or action. There is a complete philosophy of education in these short details. The holy abbess found out the secret of the most renowned masters, in the inspirations of her own heart ; she discovered that without love there could be no education.

This love included everything. The bodies of the sisters were cared for as well as their souls. The winters are sometimes very severe at Assisi. Clara rose on the coldest nights and went through the dormitories, and, as a mother would have done for a child, she would put a warmer covering over those sisters who seemed to be ill protected against the rigours of the season. Her kindness was at once aroused if the health of a sister seemed to demand some attention. She would not allow the exigences of community life to be considered at such times. "The true rule for a sick sister," she often said, "is the one imposed on her by her state of health." It was no wonder that such government as this produced the happiest results. The mixture of energy and discretion, of force and gentleness, kept all the sisters in pleasant dependence. They were convinced that wisdom dwelt with their superior, inspired her actions, and spoke by her mouth. They vied with each other as to who should hear her voice, and copy her exactly in her deeds. Every will did homage to her. The contemporary biographer well

describes this empire exercised by the Saint. "Her children were not ungrateful for the benefits they received from her, they gave back tenderness for tenderness. They beheld in their mother the most affectionate solicitude, in their abbess unfailing vigilance, in their teacher instruction full of rectitude, in the spouse of the Lord holiness that pervaded all things." In his relations with this community that was such a happy completion to his work, Francis seems to have been inspired by two apparently opposite principles, which yet he was able to harmonise in exact proportions. On the one hand he felt bound in honour and fidelity to the sisters whom God had given him. "The same spirit that united us, has united them," he said, and he added still more impressively, "We might have prevented ourselves from being associated with their vocation, but to abandon them after being associated with it as we have been, would be excessive hardness." Also he did not hesitate to admit that he loved them, and he allowed no one to throw a doubt upon this perfect love. On the other hand, as we shall see, he was severe about association with women. One of his maxims was, that "the weak are lost, and the strongest grow weak in intimacy with them." He extended this rigour to the relations of monks with nuns. He thought that, notwithstanding their holy vocation, they must be visited or worked for only at rare intervals, and to this office he only admitted tried men who were diffident of themselves, and already far advanced in the spiritual life.

At the beginning, while the two Orders were close to the place of their origin, Francis seems to have chiefly followed the former of these principles. Everything had to be formed, and he gave himself to the work without counting the cost. But as soon as he saw that these souls, beloved of God, were beginning to live of themselves, like all true masters who have no greater joy than to find their services no longer needed, he left them to their own resources, and gradually withdrew himself from them. This change, though it came by degrees, seems to have astonished Clara and the sisters.

In their humility they trembled at the idea of being left in what they called their weakness, and they complained in the most touching way. Francis at once explained his reasons to them, and ended by making them see the justness of the principles by which he was guided in his conduct towards them. But at the same time he assured them that there was no question of his deserting them. He undertook, in his own name and in that of his brothers, to continue always to take interest in their spiritual and temporal concerns, offering, if it would reassure them more fully, to leave them this promise in writing. His proposal was accepted. We still have this memorial of his affectionate regard for them ; it is in the form of a letter : "*To the well-beloved Sister Clara and the other sisters who are at S. Damian, Brother Francis, salutation in Jesus Christ.*—Since, by our Lord's inspiration, you have become the children of the Heavenly Father, and the brides of the Holy Spirit, to live according to the perfection of the Holy Gospel, I desire and promise that my brothers and I shall always have particular care and special solicitude for you as for ourselves. Farewell in the Lord."

Things continued thus as long as S. Damian went on increasing within its own limits, but a question arose when its inmates became so numerous that it was necessary to find other houses for them. Should Francis remain associated with this development, and extend his care and that of his Order to all the foundations that might be made? He judged that too close a union of this kind would offer the greatest dangers, and, as was usual with him, he took a decided step in the matter. Cardinal Ugolino had shown the highest interest in the Order. Francis begged him to grant him the favour of taking official charge of the government of the nuns. He agreed to do so, and Francis took the opportunity of restricting his Order more thoroughly within its own bounds. He severely blamed some brothers for having, contrary to his instructions, employed themselves in founding some monasteries in Tuscany. Hearing that in several places they gave the nuns the name of Minors, he was



still more annoyed, and wrote at once to the Cardinal, that he might put an end to this abuse: "I pray you to grant me two things," he said, "first, as much as possible to prevent my brothers from association and intimacy with the nuns, for so only will their virtue be placed above suspicion; second, not to allow the nuns to be called anything except *poor ladies* or *poor recluses*, until a definite name has been found for them."

Meanwhile, even at S. Damian, he tried to make communication between the two houses more difficult. No brother must even show a desire to go there. One day Francis had received a small present, and he wished to offer it to the nuns. He did not intend to carry it to them himself, and one of the brothers proposed to go as his messenger. The poor man seems to have had a good excuse, for he had two daughters in the convent. Notwithstanding that, Francis received his request very severely. He reminded him of the rule, and entrusted the commission to another. It was still worse for those who went there without permission. A brother had committed this fault. It mattered not that his motive had been a most excellent one. Francis looked upon his act as a grave infraction of the rule, that he could not pass over, and though it was winter, he made him walk for a distance of several miles with hardly any clothing on. It is the most severe chastisement that, to our knowledge, he ever inflicted.

He himself now only appeared at S. Damian at intervals, which were always lengthening, and at last, the request, and almost the commands, of the vicar-general were needed before he would take his turn in preaching there. Once when he had gone there for that purpose, he noticed that the nuns, who had been long deprived of his presence, were showing eagerness, doubtless to hear the truth, but also partly with the too human desire of seeing him again. This was quite enough to make the words die away on his lips. He left the pulpit, and kneeling at the foot of the altar, he began to pray. Presently he asked for some ashes, and having made a circle

with them, he knelt within it and began praying again without saying a word. When perfect silence, mingled with something of terror, prevailed in the assembly, he stood up, and turning to the sisters, said, "We will recite the *Miserere mei Deus*." Then he knelt again and repeated the psalm in a tone of deep compunction, after which he left the monastery without seeing anyone. He had given the lesson that he thought was needed. The nuns had been shown that a man, whoever he may be, is but ashes, and sinful, and that from God only comes peace, consolation, and joy.

And so the two communities were walking in the same path without much communication with each other. They saw and loved, and if need were, assisted each other; but habitually they were more occupied with God in contemplation of Him, than with relations that, however pure they may be, are liable to diminish somewhat of the strength of the soul. This attitude, with its combination of tenderness and reserve, did not escape the men of the Middle Ages: they have symbolised it in a graceful legend. "Clara," they said, "had a great desire, for once, to eat with Francis, and she had often begged him to let her do so, but he would never give her this consolation. Then his companions, perceiving Clara's desire, said to S. Francis: Father, it seems to us that this strictness is not according to divine charity, in that thou wilt not grant to Sister Clara, a holy virgin beloved of God, so small a thing as to eat with thee, and especially, considering that through thy preaching she abandoned the pomps and riches of the world. And truly if she asked of thee a greater grace than this, thou oughtest to grant it to thy spiritual plant. Then S. Francis answered: Does it seem to you that I ought to hear her? The companions answered: Yes, father, it is just that thou accord her this grace and consolation. S. Francis replied: Since it seems so to you, it seems so to me also; but for her greater consolation, I desire that this meal be made at S. Mary of the Angels, for she has been long shut up at S. Damian, and she will be comforted to see the place at S. Mary's where she was

tonsured and became the bride of Jesus Christ, and there we will eat together in the name of God. When the appointed day was come, Clara came out of the monastery with a companion, and accompanied by the companions of S. Francis, she came to S. Mary of the Angels. There she devoutly saluted the Virgin Mary at her altar, where she had been tonsured and veiled, and then they took her to see the place until the hour of dinner was come, and meanwhile S. Francis had the meal laid upon the bare ground as was his wont. And when the dinner hour came, S. Francis and S. Clara sat down together, and one of the companions of S. Francis sat with the companion of S. Clara, and then all the other companions seated themselves humbly. Now, at the first course, S. Francis began to speak of God in so sweet, sublime, and marvellous a manner that the abundance of the divine grace descended upon them and they were all absorbed in God. And while they remained thus absorbed, with their eyes and hands raised to heaven, the people of Assisi and Bettona and the neighbouring country, beheld S. Mary of the Angels, the whole place, and the wood that was then near it as though they were burning, and it seemed as if a great fire filled the church, and the convent, and the wood all together. Therefore the people of Assisi made haste and ran down thither to extinguish the fire, believing that everything was burning. But when they reached the place they found that nothing was burning, and entering in they saw S. Francis with S. Clara and all the company rapt in God in contemplation, and sitting around that humble table. Then they understood that the fire was a divine not a material one that God had sent miraculously, to show and to signify the fire of divine love that burned in the souls of these holy friars and nuns.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Fioretti.” This legend is to be found in the Life of S. Clara published in the “Acta Sanctorum,” but the Bollandists have enclosed it between brackets, suspecting that it had been interpolated in their manuscript. They were right. It is not found in any MSS. older than theirs, besides, we know that the life of S. Clara was written by Celano, and Celano never says, “S. Mary of the Angels,” as we before remarked. It is a legend of the fourteenth century.

The whole of this anecdote, composed a century later, is without foundation, and perhaps for those who know the two Saints, without historical probability. Neither pilgrimage, repast, nor fire ever really existed. But this pretty fiction hides within it something which did exist and which no one can dispute. It is true that S. Clara and S. Francis, in spite of all precautions, entertained for each other a most sweet and pure affection. It is true that their lives, sustained by the same hope and nourished by the same celestial food, both knew seasons of rapture in which they were absorbed in God, and it is true that the men of their generation came from all sides to behold those two souls whom God had associated for the welfare and restoration of great numbers of people.

Alas! this beautiful association was too soon dissolved. Francis died in 1226, aged only forty-four years. Clara wept for her strong, tender guide, who had been the light of her youth. She called herself an orphan. But strength was the distinctive characteristic of the saintly abbess. The spring and energy of her mind soon returned to her. During the twenty-seven years that she survived Francis, "slowly breaking the alabaster of her body on the feet of her Saviour," she proved herself the faithful and intrepid heiress of the intention and rule of the Saint.

And the rule soon required a defender. As soon as the holy Founder was no more, a sort of fermentation arose in the Order. Some thought that poverty, carried as far as he had done, was at most an expedient adapted only to special circumstances, and these circumstances having disappeared, poverty, in its excessive rigour at least, ought to disappear also. For them, the invariable form of the religious life was that of the ancient Orders, that were so venerable and had been so effectually consecrated by the multitude of Saints they had produced. Others, on the contrary, more faithful to the true intention of the master, made Franciscan poverty a permanent institution. In their opinion it had been implanted in the Church, as a germ of regeneration, by the will of God and the hand of a Saint. It had already borne some



fruit, but that fruit was only a first harvest, its sanctifying action was to extend to the most distant ages. In the ranks of these latter, Clara fought for the honour of her favourite virtue.<sup>1</sup> As long as the struggle was confined to the first Order, she kept modestly in the background, only forewarning the sisters against the invasion of new ideas. But the reformers soon saw that if the women continued to practise the rule, they could not pretend that men were incapable of doing so. They went to her, but she repulsed all their advances with inflexible firmness. They were not to be so easily beaten, and they succeeded in partially gaining over Gregory IX. to their side. "The state of absolute poverty," said the Sovereign Pontiff to Clara, "seems very difficult to be always maintained by nuns." He had no doubts for her and her companions, but he was anxious about the future; he foresaw evil times and changes in politics, when the little convent in its complete destitution would have great difficulty in subsisting. Therefore he advised them not to refuse some property that he was ready to offer them liberally. Clara entreated him not to insist on this proposal. "If it is your vows that hinder you," replied the Pope, "I will dispense you from them." "No, Holy Father," answered Clara, "absolve me from my sins, but I can never believe myself dispensed from following as closely as possible in the footsteps of Jesus Christ."

After saving the rule, Clara saved her monastery also. The public calamities that Gregory IX. had foreseen, burst like a tempest upon Umbria. Frederic II. had formed the

<sup>1</sup> Clara seems to have preserved this love for poverty even in heaven. In 1561, when S. Theresa was working at the foundation of the Convent of S. Joseph of Avila, *without revenues*, she received encouragement from her which she thus relates in her own life written by herself. "The day of the festival of S. Clara, that Saint appeared to me, radiant with beauty, and told me 'to pursue courageously what I had begun, and that she would help me.' I conceived a great devotion for her, and the truth of her promise was proved by the results, for a monastery of her Order which is near ours helps us to live, and what is much more important, it has gradually aided so well in the accomplishment of my desire, that in this new house, the same poverty is practised that they observe in theirs."

design of spoiling the Roman Church of its possessions. A considerable army, partly composed of his best troops and partly of Saracen archers, whom he had brought over from Sicily, by his orders invaded the countries designated as the Patrimony of S. Peter. Full license had been given to the soldiers. The valley of Umbria, always faithful to the Holy See, was made especially to drink the cup of their wrath. Spoleto was forced to open her gates. The territories of Fano, Narni, and Assisi the town beloved of the Lord, were sacked. Then it was that a band of foraging Saracens arrived under the walls of S. Damian. It seemed a fine prey to that wicked race, who have ever thirsted for the blood of Christ. They had already scaled the walls, and were knocking at the doors of the enclosure. Great was the alarm in the community. The poor ladies, weeping, took refuge at the bedside of their mother, who was ill. Clara was not troubled. A true descendant of a warlike race, she went straight to Him who was her strength, as in like case her ancestors would have taken to their swords. "Fear nothing," she said to her sisters, "the Son of God, to whom you have given yourselves, will deliver you from these Saracens. Bring me the casket in which His holy body is contained." They brought it to her, and she prostrated herself with her forehead on the ground, and said to her Lord, weeping: "Wilt Thou, O my Saviour, deliver into the hands of the heathen these Thy faithful servants, whom I have nourished with Thy love? Ah! I pray Thee, preserve them now, for I, who am so weak, cannot defend them." Then a voice, gentle as that of a child, was heard from the tabernacle, saying these words: "I will keep you always." "And this town also, if it please Thee, O Lord; for it is through love to Thee that it supports us." "It will suffer," answered the Lord, "but it will be defended by my intervention." Then, raising her face, bathed in tears, towards the sisters, Clara said to them: "I answer for you, my dear daughters, that you shall suffer no harm; have confidence in Jesus Christ." While she was speaking these

words the Saracens were seized with a sudden panic, and retired precipitously, flying in disorder from the walls that they had scaled.<sup>1</sup>

We are not writing the Life of S. Clara, but we cannot deprive ourselves and the reader of the spectacle of her death. Never was death more serene. It was indeed *the evening of a beautiful day*.

All the sisters of S. Damian, her daughters, were standing round their mother's bed. Their hearts were pierced with grief. Her sister Agnes, who had hastened from Florence to bid her adieu, could not restrain her sobs. "Do not leave me," she said to Clara; and she answered: "My well-beloved sister, it is God's pleasure that I should go; but weep not, thou shalt soon follow me, and before dying thou wilt have a great consolation." For nearly seventeen days the invalid had been unable to take any food. Yet her strength was maintained, and she spoke of the service of God to all who approached her. As she was suffering a great deal, her confessor, Brother Rinaldo, exhorted her to patience. "My well-beloved brother," she answered, "ever since, by means of Francis, I have begun to know the grace of our Lord, no pain has seemed cruel, no penance severe, no illness hard to bear." She felt that death was near, and that she was already at its gates. She asked the brothers to read her the Passion of our Lord, and to address holy exhortations to her. Seeing Brother Juniper, the very intimate servant of God, amongst them, she seemed much pleased, and said to him, "Do you know nothing new about the good God?" And Brother Juniper let some sparks from the fire within his heart come forth, which gave Clara sweet consolation. Her sisters continued to weep. Then she turned to them again and recommended evangelical poverty to them, and reminded

<sup>1</sup> There are two accounts of this fact. The oldest of them was published by M. Cristofani in his "History of the Church of S. Damian." The other is better known, and is to be found in the Life of S. Clara published by the Bollandists. Neither of these two accounts mention that S. Clara herself carried the Blessed Sacrament, as the moderns assert.

them of the benefits God had bestowed on them. She blessed those who were present, and all the religious of the monastery, present and future. Two of the first companions of S. Francis, Angelo Tancredi and Leo, were beside her. Brother Angelo tried to console them all, though he was as much afflicted as they were. Brother Leo, ever tender and delicate, sobbing, kissed the bed on which the dying Saint lay. The sisters exclaimed that they could not live without their mother. But she, recollected within herself, said to her soul: "Depart, oh my soul! go in peace! for He who created thee has sanctified thee, leading thee as a mother leads her child. Blessed be Thou for ever, O Lord, because Thou hast created me!" "To whom are you speaking?" asked a sister, who saw her lips moving. "To my blessed soul," she replied; and soon after, turning to another sister, "Tell me," she said, "do you see the King of Glory as I do?" God opened the sister's eyes. She saw, entering in at the door, a great procession of virgins clothed in white, each with a golden crown upon her head. One of them was more beautiful than all the rest; she wore a diadem ornamented with precious stones, and her body shed forth light, which filled the whole cell. She approached Clara's bed, and, bending over her, pressed her tenderly to her heart. Clara spake no word after that celestial kiss. The next day, the feast of S. Laurence, her most holy soul was separated from her body, as a ripe fruit drops from the tree that bore it, and went to rejoin those virgins who had come to fetch her.<sup>1</sup>

Thus died, if we may call it death, she whom Innocent IV., who was present at her funeral, wished to canonise at once, and whom two years later Alexander IV. did canonise, calling her the *duchess of the humble and the princess of the poor*.

<sup>1</sup> "Vita." We have merely translated the account given by the Bollandists.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### PREACHING IN ITALY.

AT the time of his conversion, Francis thought only of literally following the evangelical counsels. His whole ambition was to become a perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. Gradually, by the unexpected arrival of several brethren, by God's visible guidance he had founded a religious Order that the Almighty had promised to increase, and that the Sovereign Pontiff had approved. Now it appeared that this Order, with the peculiar character he had given it, was a novelty in the Church. "Not only for our personal salvation have we been called," he said to his first companions; "God wills that we go throughout the world." All the founders of Orders, from the Fathers of the desert to S. Bernard, had followed a different plan. They had shut up their disciples in solitude, and devoted themselves almost exclusively to their own sanctification. Without doubt, they had thought also of the salvation of their brethren who were in the world; but they had only tried to procure it by prayer, by example, and at the most, in pressing necessities, by rare and short apparitions. Francis began to enquire whether, in uniting an active with a contemplative life, he had not presumed too much upon human strength.

From whence came this perplexity, apparently so contrary to his ideal which had always been the public life of Jesus Christ, we know not, and there is no testimony that assigns any certain cause to it. We may imagine that it might have been the failure, or perhaps the defection, of some insufficiently prepared brother, who, by wounding his heart, had opened the door to this doubt which now assailed it. Or perhaps the sight of S. Damian, where the sisters

were seeking perfection in the calm of the cloister, contributed to this result, by putting before his eyes a form of life other than his own. Whatever it may have been, he all at once was troubled by great anxiety—it was a sort of internal agony, S. Bonaventura says—and notwithstanding all his efforts, though he often had recourse to prayer, he was not able to dissipate it. We shall show in what lively colours the two sides of the problem presented themselves to him. Those who imagine that he always acted on impulse and without reflection, will see how much they are mistaken. Finding that he could not come to a definite decision, he resolved to appeal to those of his brethren with whom he was most intimate, and to abide by their advice.

The consultation was in the following terms, and though it nominally concerned Francis only, it is clear that the future of the Order as well as his own was really in question. “My brethren, what do you advise me? Which do you consider best, that I should attend to prayer, or that I should go and preach? I am a simple man who speaks without art; I have received the gift of prayer more than that of speaking. Besides, there is more profit in prayer, it is the source of grace; in preaching we only distribute to others the gifts we have received. Prayer purifies the heart and the affections, and forms a union with the one true and sovereign good; it gives solidity and vigour to virtue. Preaching makes the feet of even a spiritual man dusty; it is a work that distracts and dissipates and leads to relaxation of discipline. In short, in prayer we speak to God and we listen to Him; we have intercourse with the angels, and we are ourselves leading an angelic life. In preaching, we must use much condescension towards men, and, living among them, it is often necessary to see, hear, think, and speak like them, in too human a fashion. These are very serious objections. And yet there is a reason that seems to give it most weight with God; it is that His only Son, the Supreme Wisdom, left the bosom of the Father to save souls, to instruct men by His example and

word, to redeem them with His blood, to make of it a fountain to cleanse them and a cup to sustain them. He gave all that He had for our salvation, He kept nothing for Himself. Now it is our duty to do everything according to the model that He has shown us in His Person, as it were upon a high mountain. Therefore it seems to me more in conformity with the Divine Will, that I renounce a tranquil life and that I go and work abroad. But, once more, what is your advice? Speak, what do you think I ought to do?"

It would be difficult to characterise more forcibly the relative merits and advantages of the apostolate and the contemplative life. The pious author of the "Imitation" raised these same questions later, questions that by their very complexity have exercised the minds of all masters of the spiritual life. He, as a recluse, suggested a different solution from the one that evidently attracted Francis; but he had not a clearer insight, nor a profounder judgment on the two ways, than the Saint showed in this consultation.

It is not surprising that the brethren declared themselves to be incapable of helping Francis out of his difficulty. They conferred with him for several days on this subject, but nothing was determined, no clear light resulted from their deliberations, and Francis remained in great uncertainty as to what God required of him. S. Bonaventura says that God permitted this to be so, because He wished that His servant, whom He had already made a prophet, should learn, by a striking example, that no inspiration comes to us from ourselves. And more than this, continues the same Doctor, he wished the merit and glory of preaching to be consecrated on this occasion by a species of oracle that could only be attributed to Him.

This is how the oracle was given. Francis had the mind and the sentiments of a Minor. Though he had many times been enlightened by God, he was never, throughout his life, ashamed of inquiring of the simple as well as of the learned, of the imperfect as well as of the perfect, of the young as well as of the old, by what means he could attain to the summit of per-

fection. "It was part of his philosophy." In the present circumstance, finding no assistance either within himself or in his brethren, he had recourse to this philosophy. Choosing two of the brethren, he sent them to Brother Sylvester, the same who had once seen a cross coming out of his mouth. This humble priest was then living on the mountain which rises above Assisi, giving himself entirely to prayer. Francis sent to beg him to consult God concerning the anxiety that had taken possession of him, and to send him an answer as soon as he should receive one. He made the same request to Clara, the holy virgin, and prayed that she and one of the purest and simplest of her sisters would interrogate the Lord on his behalf, and that all the sisters would join in prayer for the same intention. The venerable priest and the virgin consecrated to God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, agreed that the divine pleasure was that the herald of Jesus Christ should continue to quit his solitude and announce the Gospel. The messengers returned and made known to him the will of God, as they had learned it.

It is said that Francis received the message which they brought, on his knees. When they had spoken, he rose, girded his loins and set out without losing a minute. All his doubts had vanished. "Let us go, my brethren," he said, "let us go in the name of the Lord." It seemed as if a new spirit had fallen upon him, his ardour was so intense, and the rapidity was so great with which he went from village to village. He appeared to be more fervent than ever, more open to all that is good, more sensible to all that is beautiful. As he drew near to Bevagna, he saw a great number of birds of various kinds, some hopping about in the grass, others perched on the trees. This unusual flock attracted his attention, and he was delighted with their beautiful plumage and their happy, animated appearance. All at once the idea came to him that he would address them as though they were endowed with reason. He told his companions to remain where they were, and advanced alone towards the birds, who showed no fear of him, but



waited with their eyes turned towards him. Seeing them so tame, he saluted them, then, having bid them listen attentively, he began in these words: "O Birds, my brothers, you are bound to praise and love your Creator very much, for it is He who has clothed you with feathers and given you wings, with liberty to fly to all places. He has made you noble amongst all creatures, assigning to you the pure regions of the air as your home. He feeds you, He gives you great trees to build your nests in, He protects you without your having to sow or reap or work in any way. You are the objects of His care and tenderness." While he was saying these and many like things, the pretty birds were moved with marvellous joy: they stretched their necks, clapt their wings, opened their beaks and looked attentively at the Saint. As to him, he was full of animation; he walked about amongst them and touched them with his tunic, and not one of them flew away. At last the man of God made the sign of the cross to bless them and gave them leave to depart, and they all took flight together. His companions, who were standing near, were filled with admiration at the sight. Francis went back to them, and this man, so simple by grace, not by nature, remarks Celano, accused himself of never having before preached to the birds, since they showed themselves so eager for the divine word.

We may smile at this innocence of a terrestrial paradise, but are we sure that the truest wisdom and the most perfect holiness may not be hidden in this anecdote. Perhaps it is difficult to believe that a flock of birds listened to a sermon and then sang a hymn of thanksgiving, but there is surely no need to take it all literally, nor to suppose that Francis himself did so. He was good in a very high degree. He found that these little creatures, usually so wild and timid, were attracted by his presence, and it seemed to him that his movements and words excited in them an impression of life and pleasure, as though they understood him. This was a cause of joy to him, a joy entirely worthy of his spirit, for it resembled, and this is the serious point of the story, the joy

of the Creator loving the things He has created, and opening His hand and blessing everything that has breath. If man has indeed been associated with the divine royalty, if he is the pontiff of creation, this royalty cannot but exercise itself by such manifestations of tenderness and heavenly peace shed from his heart upon even the humblest creatures.

Francis entered the little town, full of emotion at what had just happened, and his preaching there seems to have been affected by this emotion. The man of God, in the presence of a large audience, felt that though he might relax for a moment and preach to creatures without reason, the case was very different when he was addressing those for whom Jesus Christ died. To them the highest interests only were of importance and required to be treated of. This thought made him more impressive than ever, and his hearers could not resist the truth which fell from his lips. Conversions became numerous, especially when a striking miracle proved to all that God was with His servant. A young girl in the place had lost her sight. When she heard Francis, she thought that such a saintly interpreter of the Saviour's preaching must be able to perform miracles also. Her parents led her to him, and in a tone of perfect confidence she conjured him to have pity on her sad lot. Francis, witnessing her faith, and doubtless moved by an impulse from above, did not refuse her prayer. Following the example of our Lord, he made the sign of the cross with spittle three times upon her eyes. They were immediately opened, and the poor girl saw once more the sweet light of day for which she had so long mourned.

From Bevagna Francis went to Alviano. On this mission he became again aware, and in a more marked manner, of the extraordinary power he had before exercised, almost unconsciously, over birds. The report of his arrival soon spread. The man of God, the holy reformer, they said, is come. Everyone went to see and hear him, and a great crowd assembled on the public square. They begged him to begin speaking at once, and Francis, inspired by the sight of the

large audience, did not require pressing. He mounted on an elevated place, probably the balcony of one of the houses in the square. All eyes were fixed on him; silence was gradually falling upon the confused multitude, expectation was high, when they found they would have to give up the pleasure of hearing him. It was in spring, and the swallows in great numbers were building their nests under the eaves of the houses, and were making such a noise and fluttering of their wings, that a much stronger voice than that of Francis would have been drowned. It was a great disappointment to everybody. Then Francis, raising his head, addressed the troublesome birds. "My sisters, the swallows," he said, in a tone of mild authority, "you have chattered enough, it is now my turn to speak; be kind enough to keep silence and listen to the word I am going to announce to this people." To the great astonishment of the assembly, not one bird twittered again, and what was still more marvellous, not one moved from its place. This sight, added to the eloquence of Francis, filled their hearts with the greatest enthusiasm. "He is indeed a Saint, and the friend of the Most High," they exclaimed, and they pressed round him, trying to touch his clothes, and singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God.<sup>1</sup>

This success, in which God's hand was so clearly shown, increased the ardour of S. Francis. During the whole of this mission his eloquence seems to have reached a point it had never before attained. At Ascoli he gained one of his greatest victories. Not only did the inhabitants flock to hear him, so that, as Celano says, they almost stood upon one another to find places, but so great was the effect pro-

<sup>1</sup> S. Bonaventura says that the report of this prodigy was spread afar, and in proof of it he relates an anecdote that was current in Paris, or, as some MSS. say, in Parma. A student who was disturbed in his meditations by the twittering of a swallow, said to his companions: "This swallow must be one of those that hindered S. Francis from preaching. I will make it silent;" and turning to it he said, "In the name of Francis the servant of God, I command thee to keep silence and to come to me." On hearing the name of Francis, the swallow was silent immediately and came to him. Surprised at such obedience, the student set it at liberty and was no more troubled by it.

duced by the power of the Almighty by means of his words, that thirty men from the clergy and people all at once requested to be allowed to take the habit of the Minors. From that moment the populace was gained ; it had a sort of cultus for Francis. He never could show himself in the streets without being at once surrounded by a crowd ; it was a struggle for who should get near him ; they thought themselves favoured of God if they could have the good fortune of touching his garments.

Though we have no precise date, everything seems to indicate this as the time when S. Francis preached at Arezzo. Once before, he had appeared at the gates of that city, but the inhabitants were then suffering from internal disorders, which were very nearly the cause of their complete ruin. Hearing of these sad dissensions, he remained in one of the suburbs, and had seen the devils in the air over the town rejoicing in its strife and urging the citizens to mutual slaughter. Then he called Brother Sylvester, who accompanied him on this occasion. "Go to the gate of the city," he said, "and in the name of the All Powerful God command the devils to go out of it at once." The faithful disciple obeyed. After fortifying his heart by singing a hymn to the Lord, he placed himself at the principal gate and cried aloud : "In the name of the All Powerful God, and by the orders of His servant Francis, depart from hence all ye demons who are here." Peace was soon afterwards re-established, and the citizens again felt towards one another such sentiments as befit a civilized community. They were in the enjoyment of this harmonious state when Francis came to announce the Word of God to them. The bold and eloquent preacher did not fear to allude to the recent troubles in the city. He began thus : "People of Arezzo, you were formerly delivered over to the malicious power of the devil. If your bonds have been broken, and you are now at peace, you owe this partly to a certain poor friar of Jesus Christ ;" and he related what he had seen and done on his first visit. How must their hearts have been



stirred at hearing this ! And what a welcome he must have received from the inhabitants of this town, whose wounds were yet bleeding, and who saw in him the true peacemaker, who had returned to confirm his former work and to remind them that, as they were all children of the same God, they ought to love one another like brothers !

His name by this time was in everyone's mouth throughout central Italy, and the towns rivalled each other in giving him the warmest welcome. One of the historians says, that as soon as they knew that he was coming, the bells rang, and clergy and people were all in a state of joy. They tried to repeat in his honour the triumph that Jerusalem in a fit of enthusiasm once made to our Lord. Men, women, and children broke off branches from the trees, and accompanied him into the city, carrying them in their hands and singing hymns. He came in the name of the Lord, and they welcomed him as the Lord's messenger. When once he was amongst them, the populace had eyes and ears for none but him. The churches were filled as soon as a sermon from him was announced. Even in the streets they eagerly gathered up his words. The heretics, who had been before too much considered, now had to hide themselves ; the re-kindled faith of the people would no longer tolerate them. This extraordinary veneration was to increase up to his death. Latterly, it was with difficulty that he could move along, because the people thronged so to see him, and sometimes he could not protect his poor tunic, which they cut up into little pieces and distributed amongst themselves as relics.

Besides what we have said about the Saint's holiness and eloquence, two things which we have not yet mentioned contributed to this enthusiasm. The first was that, having from the very outset of his conversion been penetrated with the most delicate respect for the hierarchy of the Church, he made this respect one of the fundamental laws of his Order. He himself and all the brethren carried this sentiment to the highest point. It seems that at the beginning of the Order

they had made a bad choice of a confessor. They were warned from several quarters that the man to whom they had given their confidence was far from being worthy of it. Not one of them would give faith to these accusations ; they, like all innocent souls, supposed it impossible that a priest could do wrong. They even went so far as to think he could not make a mistake. One day, for some reason or other, this confessor gave one of them a bad reception. "Take care lest you be nothing but a hypocrite," he said to him harshly. The poor brother felt deeply hurt by this reproach. He did not doubt that he deserved it, but he asked himself how a vice of which he had the greatest horror, could, unknown to himself, have crept into his heart. For days he could think of nothing else, and he was filled with anguish. He only regained his peace of mind after Francis had assured him that the priest had intended more to forewarn him for the future than to accuse him for the past. Experience of life, by opening their eyes, gave them greater assurance, but they always maintained this spirit of deference and submission. "Make yourselves small and humble to everyone," Francis used to say to them, "but above all make yourselves small and humble to priests. The care of souls has been entrusted to them. We are only auxiliaries whose mission it is to supply what they cannot do. Therefore we must maintain the respectful and submissive attitude that befits auxiliaries ; this is the price we must pay for concord between them and us, and concord amongst clerics is the great means of gaining souls to the Lord." This, then, was their line of conduct. They would never enter upon any field of labour without the invitation, or at least the consent, of him to whom it had been entrusted ; and when they had been admitted to work there, they never took the liberty of acting as though they were masters. A policy so in conformity with the order established by Jesus Christ was a great recommendation to them. Bishops and priests had no misgivings in seeking their assistance ; on the contrary, they felt themselves honoured and

respected by them, and they willingly handed over their flocks to the teaching of the Holy Spirit who spoke by their mouths.

Another cause recommended them even more. From the period on which we are now entering, Francis was invested by God with a miraculous power rarely to be met with in the same degree. All nature, water and fire, fish and animals, men themselves with their infirmities, their passions, even their most secret thoughts, everything seemed to be given into his hands and to recognise his dominion, and in this respect he may perhaps be likened to Moses, who worked such wonders in Egypt, and to whom God said: "Behold I have appointed thee the God of Pharaoh" (Ex. vii. 1). We shall have occasion to return more than once to this subject, but we wish to indicate at least in passing, this source of authority and influence. Pascal remarks on the subject of the works of Jesus Christ: "His miracles reveal Him—they are like a flash of lightning." The people of Italy, like those of Judea formerly, were struck by all these rays of light, and they thronged around the man from whom this lightning came to them.

Nor was the personal presence of Francis indispensable for bringing forth the fruits of salvation. His widely extended fame often rekindled the torpid faith in men's souls, and by hearing of the miracles that he was performing, those who had grown negligent were awakened to the consideration of their eternal interests. Sometimes a providential circumstance finished the work begun in the heart, and became the spark that kindled the sacred fire. A magistrate of Città Castellana, in the neighbourhood of Florence, called John Parenti, was one of those who had too long been careless about his soul. Hearing of the reformation going on in Umbria, he had begun to reflect upon it, when, one evening while walking in the country, he met a swineherd in difficulty with his herd. He wanted to drive them into the stable, and they, refusing to go in, were running to right and left. Finally, he lost patience and cried out, "Go in, you beasts, go in as lawyers and judges go into hell," and immediately the animals

rushed into the sty. This chance speech of a boy of some wit, and who, perhaps, had some grudge against the law, went straight to Parenti's heart. He began thinking of the dangers of his profession, and of the perils of life in general. The business of salvation seemed to him the only business to be undertaken, and the narrow road the only road to be followed with certainty. Convinced that he must change his state of life, he went to Florence, where Francis then was, and after consulting him, by his advice he took up the Saint's course of life. His only son, with whom he had shared his thoughts, found he could not do better than follow him. They both sold their goods, and joyfully clothed themselves in the Minor's habit. We shall meet with this personage again; it was he who, after becoming an admirable religious, succeeded Francis as Minister-General of the Order.

The readers will have observed how vocations were multiplying on all sides. The buildings at the Portiuncula, even with the enlargement they had undergone, could not furnish shelter for these new-comers. And so the little monastery, like a hive when it becomes too full, began to send forth its young swarms into the neighbouring provinces. There is no doubt that the first foundations of the Order date back to this period. Unfortunately, but little of their history has been preserved, though they must have abounded in instances of generosity and devotion. We will give an account of two of them which are known to be authentic. The honour of founding the most important and the most distant one from Assisi belongs to the first-born son of S. Francis, S. Bernard of Quintavalle. He had left Assisi with the blessing of Francis, and, preaching as he went along, he reached Bologna. The same thing that had happened to him in Florence, happened to him in this learned, busy city. The students and children, seeing him dressed in a strange, miserable manner, insulted and jeered at him as though he were a lunatic. "But Brother Bernard bore all these things patiently and cheerfully for the love of Christ. Moreover, that he might be the more tormented, he went



purposely to the public square of the city and sat down there, and there came to him troops of men and children, and one pulled his hood behind, another in front, one threw dust at him, another threw stones, yet Brother Bernard, with the same patience and the same cheerful countenance, remained calm and without complaint. Now, he returned many days to the same place to bear the same treatment. And as patience is a work of perfection and a proof of virtue, a learned Doctor of Laws, named John Pepoli, seeing such constancy and virtue in Brother Bernard, and that through so many days no outrage had troubled him, said to himself, 'It is impossible that this be not a holy man,' and approaching, he asked him, 'Who art thou, and why art thou come here?' Brother Bernard, for answer, only put his hand into his breast and pulled out the rule of S. Francis, and gave it him to read. And when the Doctor had read it, and considered the sublime state of perfection that it prescribes, he was struck with astonishment and admiration, and turning to his friends he said, 'Truly this is the sublimest state of religion that I have ever heard of; this man and his companions are the holiest people I have met with in this world; it is a great sin to revile him, he ought to be highly honoured as a true friend of God.' Then he said to Brother Bernard, 'If you like to establish here a convent where you can conveniently serve God, I will willingly give it you for the salvation of my soul.' And Brother Bernard answered, 'Sir, I think that our Lord Jesus Christ has inspired you with this; for His honour, I willingly accept your offer.' Then the judge, with great joy and charity, took Brother Bernard home with him to give him the house he had promised him, and he arranged it and furnished it at his own expense, and from that time became the father and special defender of Brother Bernard and his companions. Brother Bernard, by the holiness of his life, began to be much honoured by the people, so that he reckoned himself fortunate who could see or touch him. But, like a true disciple of Christ and of the humble Francis, he feared that the honour

of this world might injure his peace and the salvation of his soul, and so one day he set out and returned to Francis, and said to him, 'Father, the convent in the city of Bologna is founded, send some brothers to keep it and to live in it; for I am of no more use there, and I fear I may lose more than I gain, through the great honour they pay me.' And S. Francis, hearing all the things that God had worked by Brother Bernard, gave thanks to God, who had thus begun to cause the poor disciples of the cross to spread." ("Fioretti.")

The other foundation was made by S. Francis in person. The account of it has been preserved in the acts of the blessed Guy or Guido of Cortona, who was the occasion of it, and like the story we have just taken from the "Fioretti," it is full of the simplicity and charm of those early days of the Order. This is the translation of it: "In the course of his preaching, the blessed Francis arrived at Cortona with one of his companions. At that time there dwelt in the city a devout young man named Guido, who lived near the Porta Coloniale. He had preserved his chastity from infancy, and lived honestly on the means his parents had left him. What remained over of his revenues, and what he gained by the work of his own hands, he distributed to the poor of Jesus Christ, and he was diligent in the exercises of prayer and penance. The first time that S. Francis preached to the people, Guido threw himself at his feet after the sermon, and entreated him, in the most pressing terms, to be so kind as to come to his house and rest there awhile. S. Francis was immediately enlightened by a spiritual light, and turning to his companion, he said, 'By the grace of God this young man will be one of us, and will sanctify himself amongst his fellow-citizens.' And accepting the offered hospitality, he, with his companion, followed the young man to his dwelling. There they made a little repast together, after which, Guido, again casting himself at the knees of the Saint, asked him the favour of being received amongst his disciples. Francis accepted his request, but on condition that, as the young man was the sole inheritor in his family, he should sell all his

goods. This was done, and they all three went through the town distributing the money resulting from the sale. When this was finished, S. Francis led Guido into the church and clothed him with the habit of the Order in presence of all the people. Then as he greatly loved solitude, he retired with him to a short distance outside the town, to a place now called the Cells of Cortona. There they built a little monastery, and began to receive brethren in it. While S. Francis was living in this place, daily increasing in works of devotion and penance, it came to pass that his prolonged fasts made him fall into a quartan fever. While he was shivering with this fever, an inhabitant of Cortona, who came to see him, gave him his mantle for the love of God, and Francis accepted the present for the same love. But a poor woman came to beg at the convent, with two children, and Francis, having nothing else to give, gave her the mantle. The brothers seemed surprised at this act. 'The mantle,' said he, 'was only lent me until I should meet some one who needed it more than I.' These words edified them all extremely, and they were confirmed in the love of holy poverty. This was the life of S. Francis in that place.

"But Guido, wishing to give himself up still more to the contemplation of divine things, testified to the Saint a desire to have a more solitary cell. The latter willingly granted him his desire. The monastery was situated in a valley watered by a little stream of clear water. Francis had a plank thrown across this stream, and a cell constructed in a cleft of a rock on the other side of it. There the young brother took up his abode during the day, only joining the community at the hours of the Offices. The number of religious was increasing, and Francis saw that the time was come for him to go to another place; so he blessed them and departed, encouraging them to persevere in what they had begun in the name of Jesus Christ, and recommending them to the prayers of the blessed Guido, who was living amongst them in all humility and submission."

Of the other convents founded at this period, unfortunately

no particulars of their foundation have come down to us, we have only a dry enumeration of their names. Those of Pisa, San Miniato, San Gimignano, Siena, Prato, Arezzo, Florence, and Foligno, are generally referred to this time. The grain thrown into the earth was bearing fruit a hundred fold; the little seed was becoming a great tree. This rapid increase doubtless rejoiced Francis; he recognised in it the hand of the Lord, who, according to His promise, was extending the work that He had blessed at its commencement. And yet this progress, desirable though it might be, was not without sacrifice for the holy Founder. He had to disperse his first companions, those whom he had so tenderly formed, with whom he had lived, and whom he was always so happy to meet again when he returned from his apostolic journeys. His heart suffered from these separations. One day while thinking, as he often did, about all his beloved absent ones, he thought he had found a remedy for these separations. It seemed to him that if, twice a year, at fixed times, all the brethren met in a Chapter at the Portiuncula, it would be an advantage to the whole Order, as well as a consolation to himself.<sup>1</sup> On further reflection, he found this idea so good, that he made it one of the fundamental rules of the Order. He commanded all the brethren, wherever they might be, to come every year to the Portiuncula at the feasts of Pentecost and S. Michael. The first of these plenary assemblies appears to have been held in the very year of which we are speaking. It was indeed not one of the most celebrated, and it is not even reckoned amongst the general Chapters, but Francis there fully revealed himself; and the historians have taken the opportunity for telling us how he understood his office on these occasions.

He spent himself without stint, desiring that each brother should gain a renewal of life in those days passed together, and that at the same time the Order in general should

<sup>1</sup> We believe that these Chapters began to be held in 1212, because that is the date of the foundation of several convents in central Italy.



become more exact and settled in its action, and he omitted nothing that could conduce to these two ends.

To attain the first he employed what we have before mentioned as one of his resources, private and individual direction. He divided the brethren into three divisions, the fervent, the troubled in spirit, and the tepid, and with wonderful correctness he recognised at a glance to which class each one belonged.

At that time the fervent were the most numerous. Many were even carried away by an exaggerated zeal. In their ardour for subduing the flesh they seemed to arrive at hating themselves. They wore chains, and multiplied beyond measure their watchings, fastings, and penances. Francis boldly put a check upon these ; while showing them perfect kindness, he spoke forcibly of reason which must regulate piety as it regulates human life. And if he saw them, like generous coursers, too much impelled by their own ardour, he did not hesitate to employ the curb. He who did not like commanding, and said that commands should be like the sword that a brave man does not draw needlessly from its scabbard, commanded under such circumstances. By precise prohibitions and detailed rules, he protected a good servant from his own enthusiasm, and preserved him for his work by defending him from excesses which would have exhausted his strength before its time.

There are always a certain number of troubled spirits in a numerous assemblage of men. Trials are one of the conditions of community as of any other kind of life ; they come both from within and from without, from the constant effort of being virtuous, from the temper of those one lives with, from the devil, from everything, in short. Some of the brethren brought to Francis the confidence of these secret wounds ; they showed him the difficulties that they met with, and did not hide the fear that these difficulties might cause them to fall away. Francis was neither hard nor unsympathetic. His own courage and heroism did not prevent him from understanding all that was painful in the

situation, or grievous in the affliction of another. He fully entered into the thoughts of the poor brothers, and showed them the sincerest compassion. They knew by his words and tone that he loved them. They felt they were in presence of a father, who, like S. Paul, had the right to say : "Who is weak and I am not weak, who is scandalized and I am not on fire?" This sympathy was a remedy in itself, and Francis finished their cure by representing to them that nothing great can be accomplished without effort, and that what they were attempting was a great enterprise, and that God had laid up for them the most splendid reward if they carried it to a successful end.

Lastly, sad to say, there were the tepid, those who, after a good beginning were tempted to become unfaithful to God's grace and to the rules of the Order. Human weakness is not slow in showing itself, and even then some half-hearted souls were to be found amongst the number of the brethren. Francis was no less gentle with them than with the others, for he was gentle at all times, but authority was firm in his hands ; he knew how to reprove, to blame, to correct. His burning words were like a sword penetrating to the quick. He was happy if he could strengthen a failing resolution and gain the soul of a brother by following our Lord's recommendation, "If thy brother shall offend thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone."

While he provided for the wants of each individual, Francis did not neglect the general interests of the Order, and he attended to these at the meetings where all the brethren were assembled. The broad lines of the instructions he gave on these occasions have been preserved to us.

His first directions were for the relations of the brethren with priests. We have mentioned before that he desired them to be of the most respectful nature, and he frequently insisted upon this respect. They are pastors, he said, and they have been divinely appointed to bring into existence and to administer the sacraments. This double power entitles them to our homage. We should never pass or meet them

without bowing before them, and if they permit it, without kissing, not only their hands, but even the feet of the horses who carry them. For my part, he added, if I met at the same time a Saint from heaven and a poor priest, it would be the priest whose hands I would first kiss. Were the Saint S. Laurence himself, I would say to him : " Allow me, Saint Laurence, the hands of this priest touch the Word of Life, they have acquired a superhuman dignity." These are excellent words, worthy of the faith of a great Saint, and, like all that appertains to truth, full of deep meaning. To a clergy too often slack in its duties, there could be no better lesson on sacerdotal holiness than these signs of unmerited respect. And on the other hand, how warmly must the clergy have welcomed auxiliaries who began by exalting them so delicately in their own eyes and in the eyes of the people.

The same spirit of moderation is to be found in the advice S. Francis gave concerning the attitude to be taken with regard to riches, or as the historians express it, with regard to those who lived in opulence and were delicately nurtured. To those who carried poverty to the extent which he inculcated, there was a temptation to attack indiscriminately all whose ways were contrary to their own. Heretical reformers had fallen into this excess ; they had confounded and troubled everything by upsetting the foundations of all property. Against this danger Francis guarded his disciples, and results showed how farsighted he had been in this matter. " Do not use the sacrifices you impose upon yourselves as a weapon ; beware of haughty reproofs ; we must show the same mercy to them that has been shown to us ; the God who has called us may also call them by and by." And he added, enlarging on these words : " I wish all who are here never to call the rich anything except brothers and lords. They are our brothers since they have the same Creator as we ; and they are our lords also because without them we could not persevere in the destitution that we have made our law."

Francis extended this spirit of tolerance even to sinners. He did not like them to be spoken ill of, and repeated in their favour the argument he had used for the rich. "He who has justified us, may justify them also." And he did not merely affirm this simple possibility; he added, "It is even certain that there are many amongst them who to-day are members of the devil, who will become true disciples of Christ. Perhaps they will go before us. This thought alone ought to suffice to keep us from all violence of language. But more than that. We have been sent to cure the sick, to heal the wounded, to bring back to the truth those who are ignorant and in error. That is our office, one that is not accomplished by the use of cutting words and sharp reproaches; it is accomplished by becoming a peace-maker, as were the Apostles, by putting on bowels of compassion and mercy. And it is not enough that this compassion be in our words only. The important thing is that it should be in our deeds, that all who see us may, by occasion of us, praise our common Father, who is in heaven." In this way he obtained that sincere spirit of holiness which is the most important of all, and without which nothing can be done. He taught that there must be light within, before it can shine upon the outer world. Thus the days went by. We can understand what one of the historians of S. Francis says: "He was full of the grace and wisdom of the Saviour." And another: "The brethren valued the gift they had received; not one of them cared to talk of profane matters. They discoursed on the holy examples given by some amongst them, and sought together ways of growing in grace and in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ."



## CHAPTER IX.

### FOREIGN MISSIONS, 1213-1216.

*LET not him who would name that place call it Ascesi, for he would say too little, but Orient, if he desire to name it right* ("Paradiso," xi.). To the poet, the *Orient* is the place from whence light springs. The true light, that which is the light and joy of souls, had indeed arisen in Assisi, and then from the heart of Francis and his first companions it had radiated, as we have seen, over the whole of Italy. And now these valiant apostles, and more especially their chief, began to cast their eyes to a greater distance. They knew—for men's minds were full of it—that for more than a hundred years Europe had taken up arms in the land where the Gospel was first preached, and had fought bloody battles to recover the city and sepulchre of Jesus Christ. Francis was too chivalrous not to recognise all that was great in these expeditions, but he asked himself whether there were not a shorter way of attaining the desired end. Why should they not try to gain over to the truth these redoubtable enemies of Christianity, who had been attacked so fiercely and with so little success? How many lives might be spared, and what a conquest and increase for the Church it would be if they succeeded! If they fell, it would probably be by martyrdom, and martyrdom was the greatest mark of love given to God and men. For Francis, who was just entering the thirty-third year of his life, the same age in which our Lord died for us, it would be the last and best resemblance between him and the Divine Saviour. His mind dwelt long upon these thoughts. His faith, his ardent piety, the vein of heroism in his nature, all inclined him in that direction. At the beginning of 1213, seeing

his work more and more approved of by his fellow-citizens, he opened his mind to his disciples on the subject he had been meditating. They, convinced that God directed him in everything, made no objection. It was decided that Francis should attempt this difficult and noble enterprise.

It is generally asserted, and with great probability, though without positive certainty, that Francis did not set out without having first obtained the consent of the Head of the Church. Innocent III. was quite capable of understanding so generous a design. This illustrious Pontiff was full of the ideas of those times, and he believed that in a struggle against infidels, force was the thing of primary importance. At his first accession to the Pontificate he had assembled a large army of Crusaders, who had been absorbed in the delights of Constantinople as a flood is absorbed in the sands. Now he was employing his indefatigable ardour in collecting another army, which this time was to carry the war into Egypt, into the very centre of the Sultan's territory. But while putting his principal confidence in arms, Innocent III. had recourse to other methods more directly inspired by the Gospel. Twice he had personally addressed the consciences of those against whom he fought. He had written to the Sultan of Aleppo: "I learn from a reliable source that you are full of veneration for our faith. I will hope, of the Divine Goodness, that you will not rest there, but that, enlightened from on high, you will soon adore with us the Eternal God who, for the salvation of men, made Himself a man in this world."<sup>1</sup> Still more recently he had written to the Sultan of Damascus and Babylon, the same that Francis proposed

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the letter addressed by Alexander III. to the Sultan of Icona in 1169. It is a complete exposition of the Catholic faith. It begins with these words: "We have learnt by your letters, and by the faithful report of our envoys, that you desire to be converted to Christ, and that, having already received the Pentateuch of Moses, the prophecies of Isaias and Jeremias, the epistles of Paul, the Gospels of John and of Matthew, you ask for an orthodox man who shall more amply instruct you, in place of us, in the law of Christ." We see that there was even then a tradition for an apostolate by word of mouth and by teaching.

to visit: "We are the disciples of Him who said in the Gospel, Learn of me to be meek and humble of heart. We feel ourselves induced to say to your Greatness, shall we fight each other always? Has not enough human blood been shed?" We see from this how much inclined Innocent III. would naturally be towards the idea of a mission. He would find no better man than Francis who would be likely to make such a mission successful. God had marked him out as one of the auxiliaries that He was keeping in reserve for the good of His Church. His words had begun to awaken men out of sleep. Who could say whether He who holds hearts in His hand would not also give him power over the fierce enemies of Christ, as He had formerly given power to Clotilde and Remi over the heart of the King of the Franks? We cannot doubt but that Innocent, animated by this hope, opened his arms to the intrepid missionary whom he had already once blessed. He could not disguise from him the difficulties and dangers of the task, but he encouraged him and told him that he felt confidence in putting the fate of the Church in this matter into his hands.

Besides this approbation, Francis obtained at Rome a success that perhaps he had not expected.

He had preached and spoken of his work, for he was faithful to the recommendation of the Apostle to profit by all occasions, and to insist in season and out of season. Two recruits, who afterwards proved excellent ones, offered themselves to him. One was a Roman named Zaccarias, the other an Englishman named William. The latter attained such a rank in the Order that those who, like Bernardo da Bessa, accuse John of Capella of having been a Judas, put him in the place of that traitor, and class him, though we do not see on what authority, amongst the twelve first disciples. A person more justly celebrated was also gained to the Order at this time. This was a noble lady of the family of the Frangipani of Settisoli. She was called Jacqueline. She, like S. Clara, believed that the salvation

of society was bound up with the reformation of Francis, and this conviction took possession of her mind and inspired the rest of her life. She did not leave the world, as the Saint's young compatriot had done, but she put all her riches and influence at the service of the brethren. The Franciscan family had no more active patron. She did so much that a day came, we are told, when S. Francis called her in joke, "Our brother Jacqueline." In those first days, being a woman who was not afraid of business, she treated with the Benedictines of S. Cosimato in Trastevere, and induced them to renounce in favour of the Minors certain buildings attached to the hospital of S. Blaise. These buildings became the first convent that the Order had in the capital of the Christian world. They exist at this day under the name of *San Francesco a Ripa*. The little cell is shown there in which S. Francis lived when in Rome; it has been made into a chapel, and is greatly venerated.

But Francis was anxious to begin his expedition. He returned to Assisi to fetch a companion whose name we do not know, appointed Peter Catani to take his place in the government of the Order, and embarked, probably at Ancona. The vessel was already far from land when contrary winds arose with such violence and persistence, that the mariners were obliged to seek shelter on the coast of Illyria. They thought it would only cause a delay of a few weeks, but the stormy weather continued. It was soon evident that to cross the Levant in that season was impossible. This was a disappointment for the holy missionary, but he was not discouraged. During the first few days he preached at times. When he understood that for the present he must give up his project, he resolved to return to Ancona. A vessel was about to sail for that port. Francis presented himself, but as he had no money to pay his passage, they refused to take him on board. Then he lent himself to a stratagem for which no one will judge him harshly. One of the sailors, more pious than the others, was touched by the hardness with which the captain had rejected the man of



God ; he went to him and offered to introduce him and his companion secretly into the ship, on condition that they would both remain hidden. Francis accepted the offer without hesitation. At nightfall the two brethren were conducted by the sailor down into the hold, where they crouched into a corner behind some horses that were placed there. Hardly had they got in, when an unknown person, probably one who had heard them preach, brought them a large packet of provisions. "Take this," he said to the sailor who was in the secret, "take great care of it, and, as the need arises, distribute it to the poor brothers that you have hidden." The anchor was weighed, but the high winds which seem to have prevailed throughout the year began to blow again, and the vessel was terribly tossed. It may not have been in very great danger, but it was so beaten about, that the crossing, which should have taken but a short time, was prolonged beyond ordinary limits. Then another trouble arose besides fear. Provisions were exhausted, and the crew were threatened with the horrors of famine. Fortunately the store of the two brothers was not nearly at an end, and Francis, hearing of the distress his fellow-travellers were in, came out of his hiding place, and having, in a few words, explained the fact of his presence, he distributed the remains of the food that he had. God seconded his generosity, the provisions were multiplied in his hands, and no one lacked until the day when, the weather becoming calm, the ship was able to enter the port of Ancona. Passengers and crew were enthusiastic ; they proclaimed to every one that they had been saved by a saint, and they praised God, who had shown Himself thus kind and admirable in his servants. Francis profited by this good impression to preach several times in the city. His sermons were a great success. "He made an abundant harvest," says S. Bonaventura. "A certain number of excellent and capable clerics," Celano says rather more explicitly, "and a still greater number of laymen of every condition, desired to give up the world." In making this resolution, they said they believed they were obeying the

will of God. In fact they triumphed over the obstacles that the devil did not fail to place in their way, and all ended by taking up the life and institution of Francis. The holy Founder took part of them to the Portiuncula as the price with which God had paid his abortive attempt. He must have presided over the beginning of their religious life, then when he saw that they were firm in their resolutions and filled with a right spirit, after a few weeks he put them in the hands of a brother in whom he had confidence, and turned his thoughts again to the project which more and more attracted his faith and courage.

The East had been closed to him, why should not the West be opened? The dreaded enemies of the Christians were as powerful there as in the lands sanctified by the footsteps of our Lord. They had indeed just received a blow from which they would find it difficult to recover. All Europe, and Italy especially, was thrilled with the news of the brilliant victory gained over them in the preceding year at Las Navas Tolosa. But even if they had undergone a greater defeat, their nature would have remained unchanged, and besides, they still were masters of the south of Spain and the whole of north Africa. There was but one way of assuring peace to the world, and that was by making brothers of them by bringing them to the faith. Francis began to question whether it were not to them that God desired to send him. He thought he heard, as S. Paul once heard at Troas, a voice crying to him from across the Mediterranean, "Pass over and help us." He offered himself to God in answer to this appeal, and once more confiding his flock to Peter Catani, he set out with his well-beloved disciple Bernard of Quintavalle. Though he had had a rough experience of the sea before, it is the opinion of the best critics that he did not hesitate to venture on it again. He embarked at Pisa, and this time the voyage was accomplished without hindrance, and he landed in Spain at the beginning of autumn. His confidence was strengthened by this favourable voyage, and without loss of time he penetrated into the interior of the

country. The historians represent him as going on his way with such ardour—intoxication they call it—that the grave Bernard could not keep up with him. In fact we find them separated from one another in a little incident that ended well though it had a bad beginning. It happened at San Celonico, a place between Barcelona and Gerona. The two missionaries were passing by a vineyard. Bernard of Quintavalle, suffering from thirst, thought it allowable to do as most travellers would have done. He gathered a bunch of grapes to refresh himself. One of the servants of the proprietor had seen him. He came down upon the poor brother, accused him of theft, and insisted on his paying for what he had taken. Bernard had not the smallest piece of money in his possession, but that did not matter to the peasant. Seeing the mantle which the brother carried on his arm, he snatched it from him, and declared that satisfied him. Francis, who was in front, was aware of what was going on. He turned back, and without entering into any discussion, he asked to be taken to the owner of the vineyard. To him the matter was soon explained, the mantle was given back, and excuses made to Bernard. The good Spaniard did more; he offered his services to Francis. His house became a sort of hostelry for the Order, where, for a long time, the brothers who came to Spain were sure of a kind welcome.

Francis resumed his journey. His intention was to go straight to the Mussulmans; he even talked of reaching Morocco, where the Sultan Mohammed, after his defeat at Las Navas Tolosa, had established the seat of his empire. But God, whose guidance he followed rather than that of his own ideas, stopped him in Spain longer than he had expected. A tradition dear to the Spaniards has it that he employed the first months after his arrival in establishing the convents of Burgos and Logrono, perhaps also those of Vittoria and Avila. We are the less inclined to contradict them, since we have already seen that there were very fervent monasteries in Spain from an early time, but we must remark that these foundations if they were indeed made, give rise to two in-

teresting questions. There, as in other places, Francis could not gain disciples otherwise than by preaching constantly. Did he preach in Spanish? It is most probable that he did. He knew Italian and Provençal, and the two languages bore the closest affinity to Spanish, being, like it, derived from Latin. To a man thus prepared, very little practice would enable him to make himself understood by those to whom he had come. The other question is more perplexing. Were the new convents entirely composed of Spaniards? Everything tends to the belief that they were, for we do not see that, at any rate at the beginning, Francis sent any of his brethren from Italy. But what must have been the inspiration and organising genius of the Founder! Great as it was, however, a certain space of time was necessary to set several houses going, and we must suppose that Francis, encouraged by success, put off for a while his project of evangelising the Mahometans.

This project received a still severer check. All these labours and journeys had slowly undermined the health of the Saint. He was suddenly attacked with a violent fever. For some days he lay between life and death. The danger was averted, but it left the patient so weak that his convalescence was very slow. It was evident to all that there could be no question about his going to Morocco. Francis accepted what appeared to him to be the will of the Almighty. But before leaving Spain, he wished to go to Compostella to make his devotions at the tomb of the Apostle S. James. He is supposed by some to have returned to Italy by sea, but a number of traditions which cannot be ignored lead us to think that, having journeyed north by short stages, he crossed the Pyrenees and passed through the southern provinces of France. He does not seem to have stayed in Languedoc, which S. Dominic had begun to make his domain, but his passage has been noted at Perpignan and Montpellier. He is said to have predicted in this latter town that part of the hospital where he lodged would soon be transformed into a convent of his Order,



which prediction was accomplished less than six years afterwards. Then we find him at Lunel, where the baron of that name gave him a cordial welcome. He repaid the kindness they showed him by blessing his host's house, and the blessing did not prove unfruitful. A grandson of those who had received him, the Blessed Gerard, took the cord and the habit of penance at the age of five years in the Franciscan convent, lived an angelic life in his father's castle, and died in the odour of sanctity at Monte Santo near Loreto, just as he was about to start for the Holy Land. His cultus has been authorised, and his feast is celebrated in the diocese of Montpellier. From Lunel S. Francis reached Avignon where he remained some days, then he entered the valley of the Durance intending to reach Gap. It was midwinter in 1213. The water courses, abundant in that district, were swollen, and one day Francis came to a torrent that he could not cross. Fortunately at that moment there came up a young miller with some mules laden with flour. Finding the two brethren in difficulty, the good fellow was charitable. He put the sacks on the ground, made Francis and Bernard mount the animals which he drove through the water and landed the passengers on the other side. The chronicle tells us that his good deed was rewarded, but does not inform us in what manner. Francis arrived at Gap without further adventure, and having lodged apparently in a house called to this day *Bon Estaou* (good inn) he penetrated into Piedmont by Monte Ginevra.

Some words of Thomas of Celano lead us to think that as soon as he reached Italy Francis returned to Assisi without further delay. "Praised be God," says the good biographer, "Who in His bounty deigned to remember me and many others. When Francis was in Spain, God opposed him, and let loose upon him a serious illness to prevent him from going further. And indeed he returned to S. Mary of the Portiuncula, and had hardly arrived when a number of noble and learned men hastened to offer themselves to him. The Saint, whose soul was nobility itself, and who was

gifted with exquisite discernment, received them with much honour, treating each one with the respect due to him ; for it was one of his gifts that he knew how to put into his tone and manner all that the dignity of the persons with whom he treated demanded, without sacrificing the requirements of the rules." These words seem to agree with the fact of an immediate return to his own people, nevertheless we think it probable that his health having improved on the journey, he passed some months in evangelising the north of Italy. It is almost certain, from local traditions, that in that same year he founded several houses in Piedmont and Lombardy. Now he was never in the habit of going through a district first as a traveller and then returning directly afterwards as an apostle. He preached on the march, as in war time a soldier fights on the march.

The history of this preaching has not been recorded. In Piedmont he announced the divine word successively at Susa, Turin, Moncalieri, Asti, and Cortemiglia. His passage through these places was marked by a prodigy that Thomas of Celano relates. When he went to Alessandria della Paglia he received hospitality from a man who, in his great admiration for him, wished to make him a feast. He was not rich, but he happened to have a cock that he had brought up and had kept for seven years in his house. He proposed to sacrifice it for the Saint, but being prudent, he first enquired of him whether, in conformity with the Gospel, he would eat what was put before him. Francis, whose rule this was, said that he saw no objection, and on this assurance the old cock was killed and served up. All the family were invited to the repast, and there was innocent joy around the humble table, when there came in an ill-intentioned treacherous fellow. He was one of those sons of Belial who, themselves strangers to all that is good, cannot bear that others should appear virtuous. He presented himself before the guests, and with a tearful voice begged them to give him alms for the love of God. At that name, sweeter than honey, Francis was moved. With the consent of his hosts,

he took a leg of the cock, cut a large slice of bread and sent it all to the beggar. He was not really in want of anything. He put aside what had been given him, and the next day, after Francis had preached and everyone was filled with admiration, he stood up in the assembly: "See," he cried, "what this Francis who preaches to you, and whom you look upon as a Saint, really is. Here is what he gave me yesterday evening when he was at a feast." And he showed what he had in his hand. But God interposed to confound him; the flesh of the cock seemed to everybody to have been changed into fish, and the people burst out into murmurs against the impudent calumniator. He, becoming repentant, confessed his wicked designs and the miracle which had disconcerted them. Then he publicly asked pardon of Francis, and began to do penance.

Of his sojourn in Lombardy we also know but one fact, but it is a fact that again proves his invincible respect for the sacerdotal dignity. He was entering a village in that province. The entire population, aware of his sanctity, came out to meet him with the parish priest at their head. Unfortunately this priest was a cause of scandal. Some Cathari, who were mixed in the crowd in great numbers, thought this a good opportunity for embarrassing the Saint's simplicity and weakening the faith of the Catholics. One of them came up to Francis and said: "My good man, what do you say of the priest of this parish? He is notoriously living in sin. Ought we to believe his word? Can we respect his conduct?" The Saint saw that they were laying a snare for him. "Is this the priest of whom you speak?" said he, pointing to the curé. "It is," answered the Cathari. Francis immediately went and knelt before him, and taking his hands said: "I know not if these hands are stained, but one thing I do know, were they as much stained as you say they are, their indignity could not affect the virtue and the efficacy of the divine sacraments. Therefore, innumerable benefits have flowed through them upon Christians, and for this reason I will kiss them, honouring God by honouring

him whom he has made his minister." Saying these words he respectfully kissed the priest's hands. The heretics withdrew confounded. They had learnt that we cannot judge of the works of God by the merit or demerit of men.

On leaving Lombardy Francis inclined eastward and reached the shores of the Adriatic. At San Severino in the Marches of Ancona, he found a monastery of Poor Ladies, that had just been founded by some religious sent by S. Clara, in an old Benedictine convent. This house was the first daughter house of S. Damian. Francis stayed to encourage the sisters, and at their request, consented to preach in the chapel. Amongst the numbers who flocked to hear him, the providence of God brought in a celebrated man. He was called *The King of Verses*, because he was considered to be the prince of contemporary poets. He excelled in the voluptuous kind of songs that had come from Provence, and were greatly appreciated everywhere. His superiority was so undisputed that he had, on a special occasion, received from the hands of the Emperor of Germany the poet's crown, the same which was afterwards to adorn the brows of Petrarch and Tasso. He did not know Francis. He came to the convent by chance with some friends to visit one of their relatives. The tone, the eloquence of the preacher soon struck him; he fell into a sort of rapture; he thought, as Francis spoke, that the Saint was trans-fixed by two luminous swords in the form of a cross, the one passed from his head to his feet, the other went from one hand to the other. Francis was not long in perceiving his emotion; without ceasing to address all in general, he turned the point of his discourse towards this well-prepared heart. The poet, more and more conscious that the hand of God was on him, felt that a great work was demanded of him. As soon as the sermon was over he asked to speak to Francis. The conversation, which was both austere and tender, completely won him. They spoke together of the judgments of God and of the vanities of the world. "Enough of words," cried



the poet, "let us have deeds ; withdraw me, I pray you, from amongst men and restore me to the supreme Emperor." Francis loved decision. The very next day he gave him the habit, and because he had made him pass from the disquiet of the world to the peace of Christ, he named him Brother Pacificus.

Brother Pacificus followed Francis to the Portiuncula, where they must have arrived at the beginning of the year 1215. In this holy retreat he found a renewal of life and youth. This man, hitherto accustomed to society and brilliant festivals, felt it no hardship to be plunged into solitude. He even found therein a joy and unction that had been unknown to him in the world. His soul seemed to be lifted into a higher region, and his imagination soared more freely than it had ever done before. The more intimate he became with Francis, the more his admiration for him increased. One day, during a sermon, he saw on his forehead a cross in the form of a **T**, brilliant with colouring like a peacock's feathers. Needless to say that the master fully appreciated such a disciple. This poetic soul, now, since its call from God, filled with a holy ideal, was entirely after his own heart. And so, several years later, when stopped on his way to Paris, he had to choose someone to establish the Order there in his place, he deputed the former King of Verses to the city even then universally known for its passion for intellectual things.

The instruction of novices and the government of the Order occupied the holy Founder for the remainder of the winter. In the spring he was preparing to recommence his usual preaching, when he was again attacked by the fever that had arrested him in Spain. He resigned himself to God's hand, but at the same time he appeased the burning zeal that devoured him by a touching act, of a kind we often meet with in the Middle Ages. In those days people seem never to have lost the sort of confidence we scarcely ever feel after about our twentieth year. They were convinced that if they had a good idea or a deep feeling on any subject, the world had

but to know of this idea or feeling and immediately it would adopt it. It was thus that after having established the Truce of God, some bishops of the south "*and the venerable abbot Dom Odilon (Saint Odilon) with all the bishops, and abbots, and all the clergy inhabiting the whole of Gaul,*" wrote "*to all the archbishops, bishops, priests and clerks inhabiting all Italy,*" to recommend to them "*this new method come from heaven by inspiration of divine mercy,*" of re-establishing and fixing peace amongst men. And thus a century later, Dante, in the excess of his grief, wrote to all the princes of the earth to announce to them that, in losing Beatrice, "the earth had lost its spring, and the future of the world was threatened." Francis had nothing of this kind to say. What filled his heart were those general truths ever ancient and ever new, which are the foundation of Christian life, and consequently are interesting to all men. In his eyes these truths shone with such brilliance, that he was convinced that the whole world would walk in their light, if it only realised them more. And he undertook to recall them "*To all Christians, clerks, religious and laymen, whether men or women, who are in all the earth.*" These are the terms of the superscription of his letter. The opening is very touching. "Being the servant of all men, I am under obligation to serve all men, and to administer the balm-bearing (*odorifera*) words of my Lord. And because of the infirmity and weakness of my body I could not visit you all in person, I proposed by these present letters missive to offer you the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father, and to offer you the words of the Holy Spirit, which are spirit and life." Then follows a sort of abridgment of the mysteries of our Lord, written in great part in the words of the Gospels, after which the Saint continues thus: "All such as do not do penance, and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, but give themselves to vice and sin, and walk after their own concupiscence and evil desires, and do not observe what they have promised, but serve the world and the flesh, with its desires and cares

for this life, all these are deceived by the devil, whose sons they are, for they do his works. Blind they are, not perceiving the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ ; of these it is said : their wisdom is devoured. They see and know good, nevertheless they do evil, and wittingly lose their souls. Beware, ye blind, deceived by your enemies, by the world, the flesh, and the devil. You think you possess for long the goods of this world, but you are deceived ; a day and an hour will come speedily that you think not of, neither can you imagine it." In support of these words, Francis then adds what may be called a description of the death of a rich man. In a literary sense it is perhaps the most carefully composed piece he has written. We feel that he has taken pains to describe vividly the spectacle that his imagination represented, and that he may very likely have had before his own eyes : "The body grows feeble, death approaches ; parents and friends come saying : 'Put your affairs in order.' And behold ! his wife and children, his friends and relatives begin to weep. He, seeing them weep, moved by a bad emotion, says : 'I place my soul and my body and all that I have in your hands.' Truly this man is cursed who puts his body and soul and all that he has into such hands, for the Lord has said by the prophet : Cursed is the man who puts his hope in a man. Then they call a priest, who says to him : Wilt thou do penance for all thy sins ? and he answers, Yes—Wilt thou make satisfaction for thy shortcomings, and restore of thy substance to those whom thou hast defrauded ?—He answers, No—Why not ? asks the priest—Because I have put everything into the hands of my relatives. And then he loses the power of speech, and, unhappy man, he dies. And know, all of you, that wheresoever a man dies in mortal sin, without having made satisfaction, if he could make it, the devil receives such an one and tears his soul from his body with such anguish as none can comprehend save those who suffer it. And all talent, power, or knowledge that he thought to possess are taken from him. Those to whom he left his

goods take them and divide them, and say afterwards : Cursed be his soul because he could have given us more and did not do it ; he could have laid up more than he did lay up ! Worms feed upon his body, devils feed upon his soul, and thus he has lost both soul and body for the sake of this short temporal life."

The letter concludes thus : " I, brother Francis, the least of your servants, I am ready to kiss your feet. I pray and conjure you, by that charity which is God Himself, to receive and practise humbly these and other words of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that all those who receive them well and understand them will communicate them to others for their benefit. Whom, if they shall persevere in them unto the end, may the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless. Amen."

At Pentecost (1215) Francis wished, at all costs, to preside at the Chapter, but the effort exhausted his returning strength, and as soon as the brethren had gone back to their various posts, it was decided that he should go to a hermitage to take the rest he so much needed. The hermitage that he chose for this purpose was the one on La Vernia.<sup>1</sup> He had not founded it, nor had he yet been there, but he had acquired it two years previously under circumstances that are worth relating. He was passing one day at the foot of the castle of Montefeltro, when the lord of the place was keeping one of the great festivals of those days. The seignorial banner was floating over the entrance gate, and the sound of trumpets was heard on the ramparts. The young Count of Montefeltro, having made his vigil of arms, was to be knighted in presence of the nobles of the neighbourhood. Francis, who all his life had a strong taste for everything pertaining to chivalry, said to his companion : " Let us go to the castle, with God's help we may perhaps make some spiritual knight." And accordingly, as soon as the ceremony was

<sup>1</sup> What follows is borrowed from the " Fioretti," and is therefore not absolutely authentic, but we will draw attention to two things that are in its favour, if we are not mistaken : 1st, unlike the usual style of the author, it is written with the sobriety of a page of history ; 2nd, a certain number of the details it contains are to be found, in the shape of anecdotes, in contemporary histories.



ended, and the company were assembled in the court, he mounted on a low wall and prepared to speak. They gave heed to him, though no one expected a sermon. He skilfully chose for his texts two Italian verses: *Tanto è il ben ch' io aspetto, Ch' ogni pena m'è diletto* (So great is the good which I expect, that to me all pain is pleasure). From this he compared the hope of heaven with the finest hopes of earth. He showed how this hope, created by religion, can infuse courage and heroism into the soul. He cited the examples of the apostles and martyrs facing all kinds of tortures, and smiling at death, which would put them into possession of eternal happiness. He contrasted the chivalry of the Christian heroes with the chivalry that regarded human glory only. The subject was strikingly appropriate, and every one was moved; the legend relates that all eyes were fixed on Francis as though he were an angel. Amongst the audience was one of the most valiant knights of the Ghibeline party, Count Orlando, lord of Chiusi in the valley of the Casentino. Immediately after the sermon, he went to Francis, "I should like to talk with you about the salvation of my soul," he said.—"Most willingly," said Francis, who was as discreet as he was zealous, "but this is not quite a fitting moment. You must honour those who have invited you. First go and dine with them, and after the repast we will converse at leisure." The noble lord did so, and when he returned to Francis they discoursed for a long time about the road that leads to heaven. Orlando was in raptures. At the end of the conversation he said: "I have in my domains a mountain called La Vernia; it is exactly suited to men who desire to live in solitude. If it please you, I will give it most willingly to you and to your companions for the salvation of my soul."<sup>1</sup> Francis

<sup>1</sup> The donation was only verbal. It was formally made by the sons of Orlando on July 9, 1274. The authentic act is to be found in the "Franciscan Bulls," vol. iv. page 156. By this act we learn: 1st, that the establishment of the brethren took place on May 9, 1213; 2nd, that Orlando was a Tertiary of the Order; 3rd, that he had been received into the Order by Francis personally. This is the description made of the mountain: *terram alboratam, sa xosam e prativam*. At this day it consists of trees, rocks, and meadows.

accepted this offer, and promised to send two of his brothers to take possession of the new abode, and this he did a short time afterwards. The good count wished to go himself and establish these religious. He took fifty of his men with him, for he foresaw that there might be some work to do, perhaps some wild beasts to destroy, and they set out. The steep mountain was difficult of access; they scaled it at last, and on the summit they found, as Orlando had promised, a fine plateau covered with great trees. The brethren were enchanted with a place so well adapted to meditation. Assisted by their guides they quickly constructed some cells and a little oratory, and there, between heaven and earth, they began to lead a life of prayer and union with God.

Such was the hermitage whither Francis was going to seek the restoration of his strength. He was not in a state to climb the mountain on foot; they sought for him an ass to ride, and a good peasant, who had often heard of him, willingly lent his own, offering at the same time to go with him on the journey. He was not bashful. All along the way he conversed with the Saint. "Then," said he, "you are that Francis of Assisi who is so much talked of?"—"Yes," replied Francis. "Well, you will have hard work to be as good as they say you are. They have such confidence in you, it is difficult for you to be equal to it, at least, that is my opinion." Francis, who loved sincerity beyond everything, was charmed with this observation; he dismounted from the ass and wished to kiss the honest man's feet, thanking him for his charitable advice. After that they went on again, but as they advanced, the sun became more scorching and the road steeper. "I cannot go on," cried the peasant, "I shall die of thirst if I cannot find something to drink." Francis, who much liked him, was desirous of helping him. "O surprising bounty of God, who condescends to the secret wishes of his servants!" exclaims S. Bonaventura. A little spring, hitherto unknown, and never again found, instantly sprang out of a neighbouring rock.

Francis showed it to the poor man, who ran to it and drew from it the most delicious water.

At length they reached the top of the mountain. The calm, the beautiful vegetation, the wide prospect, delighted Francis; he seated himself under an oak to contemplate the landscape that displayed itself before his eyes. At that moment a flock of birds began to fly around him, welcoming him with their voices and the fluttering of their wings, and truly seeming, says S. Bonaventura, as though they would invite him to remain in that place. Francis heard their sweet language. "I see," he said to his companion, "that it is God's will that we sojourn here, since our arrival causes joy to our brothers the birds."

At the news that Francis was at La Vernia, Count Orlando hastened to go up there with some men carrying provisions. When the servant of God saw him coming he went to meet him. He first thanked him for the beautiful present he had made him in giving him the mountain, and the rest of the day was passed in cordial and pious conversation. Towards evening, when the time for separating approached, the count generously said to the brethren, "I do not wish you to suffer any corporal necessities upon this mountain, lest they hinder you from devoting yourselves to contemplation. I beg of you—and I say it once for all,—I beg of you to come to my house to fetch all that you want. If you do otherwise I shall be much grieved." As soon as he was gone, Francis made his companions sit down beside him: "Do not rely too much upon the offer this charitable nobleman has just made you," he said. "Be sure that, if we are truly poor, the world will have compassion on us, and will give us liberally all that we require for our lives. God who has called us has made this compact between the world and us; we must give a good example to the world, and the world must supply our necessities. Let us then persevere courageously in the spirit that is proper to us. It is the way that will lead us to eternal riches."

This abode was a source of great delight to the servant of

God. He had a little cell made under a great beech-tree, a stone's throw from his companions' cells. There he passed the greater part of his days, dividing his time between contemplation of the spectacle before his eyes, and meditation on the eternal truths. Never did he feel himself nearer to God, never did he speak to Him with more feeling and freedom. Though far away from men, he did not forget them ; he made himself the advocate and intercessor of those who were living in sin ; he entreated God earnestly to grant an effusion of His mercy and tenderness to the earth. On these occasions he was so much absorbed that he became oblivious of all that went on around him ; people might approach him or leave him, he perceived nothing. His whole being was concentrated within ; his conversation was in heaven.

Too soon he was obliged to snatch himself away from this life of retreat, which, in spite of his prodigious activity, was, as he often said, his true element. An œcumenical council convoked two years before, was to open in the patriarchal Basilica of the Lateran in the month of November.

Innocent III. wished to treat with his brethren "before he died, of the things he had most desired in this world, the recovery of the Holy Land, and the reformation of the universal Church."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, from the 19th April 1213, he had addressed letters of convocation to the archbishops, bishops, and priors of all the ecclesiastical provinces. Francis, who was only a deacon, and whose Order as yet was only verbally authorised, could not be convoked like the great abbots of Cluny, Citeaux, and Premonstratense. Nevertheless, his protectors, the Bishop of Assisi and perhaps the Cardinal of S. Paul, wished him to be in Rome during the council. He had begun one of the greatest reforms that had ever been attempted in the monastic life. This reform touched upon too many interests to be omitted altogether from the deliberations of the venerable assembly. It was right that he should be there to give information

<sup>1</sup> Expressions in the letters of convocation.



which might be asked for. The event did not justify this wise forethought. The monastic question as a whole was not discussed. The council only treated of the Orders already existing, requiring them all, after the example of Citeaux, to hold a general Chapter every three years, and of the Orders that were about to be created, forbidding them absolutely, the decree said, lest too great a diversity might cause confusion in the Church. This prohibition was in opposition to S. Dominic, who for the first time brought to Rome his Constitutions, destined for the nascent Order of Preachers. Innocent III., in spite of his goodwill, was obliged to order him to return to Languedoc that he might there, with his companions, choose one of the old Rules, whichever seemed to him the best suited to the formation of his new militia. The situation was very different with Francis. The Pontiff having formerly, after deliberation with the Sacred College, approved his Rule, he was in possession, and that possession could not be affected by the order the council had just emitted. Therefore there was no business to be transacted with the Minors, and in fact they were not mentioned.

But the visit of Francis was not without result. We have said that S. Dominic was also present in the Eternal City for the affairs of his Order. He did not know Francis, nor was he known by him. God who had chosen the two vases of election for the salvation of these times, would not permit them longer to remain strangers to each other. No one thought of bringing them together, but His providence, ever watchful over His servants, accomplished the meeting. "One night S. Dominic while praying, saw in a vision Jesus Christ displeased with the world, and His Mother presenting two men to Him to appease Him. He recognised himself as one of the two ; the other he did not know, but he looked at him attentively, and his image was impressed on his mind. The next day in a church—we know not which—he perceived amongst a group of beggars the figure that had been shown to him the preceding night, and running to this poor

man, he caught him in his arms with holy emotion, saying : " You are my companion, you will walk with me ; let us keep together, and none shall be able to prevail against us." Then he told him of the vision he had had, " and their hearts were melted together." This friendship, the joy and encouragement of the fathers, has passed on to the sons. " The kiss of Dominic and Francis," said Lacordaire, " has been transmitted from generation to generation on the lips of their posterity." <sup>1</sup>

One of the principal objects of the council had been the preparation of a new crusade. It had been decided that it should leave Europe on the 1st June 1217. Part of the Crusaders were to go by land, and part were to embark at Brindisi and Messina. The combined fleets of Pisa and Genoa had been counted on for the transport, but the two republics were at war, and the legates who had been sent to them had been unable to reconcile them. The Pope resolved to go himself to negotiate an agreement that everyone saw to be necessary. He left Rome in the month of May 1216, accompanied by some of the Cardinals, passed without stopping through the valley of Assisi, where Francis was presiding over the general Chapter of Pentecost, and made a halt at Perugia. There he was attacked by a tertiary fever, and it soon became evident that his health, undermined by overwork, demanded a long rest. One of his near relatives who accompanied him, the venerable Cardinal Ugolino, who, notwithstanding his sixty-six years, was still young in mind and curious about all that was of interest to the Church, profited by this delay to take the road to the Portiuncula. He had often heard the new Order spoken of, and he wished to judge of it with his own eyes. His expectations were surpassed. All that he saw seemed to him to be stamped with the mark of true holiness, but perhaps what struck him most was the

<sup>1</sup> Gerard de Frachet, " *Vie des Frères Prechieurs*," liv. 1 ch. i. Cited by P. Lacordaire. The authors of the *Life of S. Francis* have not mentioned this first meeting of the two holy Founders. It is briefly noticed in the " *Chronicle of the XXIV. Generals*."

poverty of the brethren. He had not imagined it possible to carry it so far. When he went through the roughly constructed cells, and saw the beds made of a little straw, more like the lairs of wild animals than resting-places for men, he could not restrain his tears of admiration. "See where these good brothers sleep," he cried, turning to the prelates who were with him. "Alas!" he added, "what will become of us who need so many superfluities in our lives?" And all shared his emotion. The eminent visitor did not stop there. The first official protector of the Order, the Cardinal of S. Paul, had died in Rome a few months before. Ugolino felt himself constrained to take the place that his venerable colleague had so well filled with regard to the brethren. He showed marked kindness in following this inspiration. "I offer myself to you," he said to Francis; "if you wish it I will be your helper, councillor, and support." Francis, hearing these words, again recognised the hand of God, Who always brought help to him when he was in need. He gave thanks to God, say the *Three Companions*, then, bending before the Cardinal, "My lord," he said, "it is with all my heart that I salute in you the father and protector of our religion; I wish all my brothers to consider you henceforth as such; your name will be in all our prayers."<sup>1</sup> We shall soon see the results of this compact. Without the Cardinal of S. Paul, the Order of Minors perhaps would never have come into existence, but certainly it never would have developed, and it would even have had difficulty in subsisting at all without Cardinal Ugolino.

On his return to Perugia the Cardinal did not fail to tell Innocent how greatly he had been edified. This was the last joy the illustrious Pontiff had upon earth. His illness suddenly increased owing to some imprudence, and he died the 17th July 1217, after governing the Church eighteen years. We are not called upon in this history of an individual to

<sup>1</sup> According to Celano, Ugolino did not know Francis till later, when the latter visited him in Florence. We think that the narrative of the *Three Companions*, properly understood, fixes their first meeting on this occasion.

give a summary of a pontificate which, for many reasons, occupies a large place in the annals of the Middle Ages, but we may appropriately consider here the homage which the biographers of S. Francis have rendered to the memory of the approver of their Order. "He was," they say, "a glorious Pontiff, full of all sorts of learning, eloquent, and a man of the world, devoured with zeal for justice, never drawing back when the interests of the Christian faith were concerned."



## CHAPTER X.

### INDULGENCE OF THE PORTIUNCULA.

ONE of the brethren whom Francis especially loved, and whom he admitted to great intimacy when he was with him, had had a vision while he was yet in the world. He was already full of the desire to give himself to God, and it seemed to him as if all the men of that time had become blind, and came and knelt around S. Mary of the Portiuncula. There they raised their hands and their sightless eyes to heaven, and implored God to give them back their sight. Their prayer was heard. A dazzling light descended from heaven, illuminated their eyes, and enveloped them all in its brilliance. When he awoke, the brother felt his intention strengthened, and a little while after he forsook the world and its pomps, entered the Order of Minors, and remained there serving God with humility and devotion.

This beautiful dream is a witness. It shows us once more to what a state of languor in faith and works souls had fallen before the preaching of Francis, and also how this preaching, the preaching of the "new evangelist," as they called him, appeared to his contemporaries to be the true cause of the renewal of life which was going on in the Church. At the same time it proves that some of the renown of the apostle had begun to fall upon the chapel where the infancy of the Order had been nurtured. Wherever the Minors went, people learnt what S. Mary of the Portiuncula was, they admired the marvel that God had worked there, they saluted it afar off as the cradle of the life that had been brought to them. And yet this fame was but a shadow of the glory that awaited the humble sanctuary. At all times God has chosen certain places, "that His name

may be there for ever, and His eyes and His heart may remain there perpetually" (2 Paralip. vii. 16). The Portiuncula was to be elevated to the dignity of one of these places. A touching thought of S. Francis, and the divine condescension of our Saviour, were to make it a source of purification and mercy unique in the world at that time. These are the circumstances that brought about this transformation.

Towards the end of July, Francis passed a night in prayer at the foot of the altar. In this long communion with God he concerned himself about the state of sinners. He was filled with pity for them; he acknowledged having once himself been in that state, and that God's merciful goodness alone had drawn him out of it; he implored ardently and for a long time, that his guilty brethren might have the same goodness shown to them. "The will of God," said the Apostle, "is our sanctification." It is not surprising that our Lord Himself deigned to bring an answer to such a petition made by such a man. He appeared to S. Francis, accompanied by His Holy Mother and a troop of angelic spirits. "You and your brethren," He said, "have done much for the salvation of souls; you may ask what you will in their favour and to the glory of My name." "Most holy Lord," replied Francis, "I am but a sinner, but since Thou permittest me, I venture to entreat Thee to grant to Thy faithful people this grace, that all who come to visit this church, being contrite and having confessed, may receive plenary indulgence for their sins." Then turning to Mary: "And I pray," he continued, "the blessed Virgin Thy Mother, the advocate of the human race, to solicit this grace with me." Mary joined with him in his prayer, and Our Lord replied: "What you ask is a great thing, but you shall obtain still more. I grant you the indulgence you desire, but on condition that it be ratified by My vicar to whom I have given all power to bind and loose upon earth."

The next day Francis took brother Masseo with him and set out for Perugia with a heart full of hope.

A new Pope had been made only two days after the death

of Innocent III. in that city. This was Cardinal Cencio of the illustrious house of the Savelli, and he had taken the name of Honorius III. All agreed in praising his gentleness of character and his solid piety, but he was also known to be an observer of rules, and on this account he was likely to oppose more than one objection to the request Francis was bringing him. In fact, up to this time, the Church had accorded no plenary indulgences except on occasion of the crusades. And this, according to the learned Benedict XIV., taking into consideration the fatigues and dangers of all kinds that these expeditions entailed, was less in the nature of an indulgence, properly so called, than of a declaration by which the Church pronounced that every crusader, who thus sacrificed himself for religion, offered to the divine justice a complete expiation of his sins whatever they may have been. Except under these circumstances, it was a principle of the Church to grant only partial remittances, and judging by her later acts, she was inclined to restrict these rather than to extend them. This is one of the canons of the council that had just been held in the Lateran where the new Pope had been one of the great lights. "Seeing that there is indiscretion and excess in the indulgences that certain prelates venture to accord, and hence the keys of the Church fall into contempt, and penance is enervated, we decree, that at the dedication of basilicas, though the dedication be made by several bishops, the indulgence conceded must never overpass one year. We will moreover that they keep always within this limit, for this is the wise reservation in this matter of the Roman Pontiffs who have plenitude of authority." We see from this that what Francis was going to solicit was neither more nor less than a change of discipline on an important point which had just received a kind of confirmation. Now S. Mary of the Portiuncula was not even a church, much less a basilica ; it was a little chapel, formerly deserted, which God had, it is true, begun to glorify, but which as yet had only an invisible glory. The only plea that Francis could urge in favour of such an innovation was

his own strong desire for the salvation of his brethren, and the approval that our Lord had secretly given to him of that desire. But this was hardly enough to induce the sovereign Pontiff to give him a favourable answer. Francis would of course declare that he had first obtained from the Invisible Head of the Church what he now implored from its visible Head, but what credit would his words obtain? The difficulty was most serious, and Francis knew it to be so, but he would not let it stop him, seeing he had been sent by Him who inclines hearts and wills.

As soon as he reached Perugia he presented himself to Cardinal Ugolino who had shown him such kindness at the Portiuncula. He at once, assuming his office of protector, introduced Francis to the sovereign Pontiff. Without any preparation he opened the object for which he had come: "Holy Father," he said, "some years ago I repaired a little church dedicated to the Mother of God, in your dominions; I entreat your Holiness to enrich it with an indulgence without the obligation of alms." "Without obligation of alms," replied the Pope, "is not the custom of the Roman Church; it is fitting that those who wish to gain an indulgence should merit it by giving aid to good works, *ponendo manum adjutricem*. And for how many years do you ask for this indulgence?" "Holy Father, I ask you not for years but for souls." "For souls? What do you mean by that?" replied the Pope. "I desire, if your Holiness will agree, that all who enter this church, being contrite and having confessed their sins and received absolution, may obtain the remission of every sin and every penalty in this world and in the next." "But this is a great and a quite unheard-of thing; it is not at all the practice of Rome to accord similar indulgences." "But it is not I who make you this request, it is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for He has sent me to you." Then he related in detail what had happened, his prayer, the vision of our Saviour, the concession He had made to him. The Pope listened with great attention. "Since this is the case," he said, when



Francis had finished, "we have but to bow our heads; it pleases us to grant you the indulgence you ask for." Some Cardinals present at the interview, interfered at this moment. They thought the favour too unlimited, they maintained that it would have the effect of injuring the pilgrimages to Rome and to the Holy Land. Honorius replied, "We cannot revoke what we have just freely granted; all that we can do now is to determine and restrict its duration." Then turning to Francis, he said, "We intend that this indulgence shall be available in perpetuity, but only during the space of one ordinary day, from the first vespers to vespers of the following day." Francis thought it a great restriction, but he understood that it would be out of place to insist, and he was retiring after profoundly saluting the Pope, when he called him back. "Where are you going, you simple man? What proof of so great a grace are you taking with you?" "Holy Father," answered Francis, "your word is enough for me, let Jesus Christ be the notary, the Holy Virgin the charter, and the angels the witnesses. I require no other guarantee, and I leave to God the care of manifesting what comes from Him." There was nothing more to be done but to fix the day when this pardon, soon to be called the Great Pardon, would be open to all. Most probably they were then celebrating the feast of S. Peter in Chains, and no day seemed more suitable than that for delivering sinners from the bonds of their sins. The Pope decided that the indulgence could be gained from the evening of that festival until the evening of the next day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> None of the historians of Francis have spoken of the Indulgence of the Portiuncula. This silence is explained by prudential motives. They may have feared that by announcing an indulgence so easily gained they would injure the difficult indulgence attached to the Crusades. In the absence of contemporary documents, we have three of a later period: First, an attestation of Brother Bennet of Arezzo, received in 1277 by the notary, John Conclasiaste; second, a letter, written in 1310 by Theobald Offreducci, bishop of Assisi; third, another letter, written in 1335 by Conrad, also bishop of Assisi. These three documents are considered authentic, though they are not of equal authority. Their dates are, as we see, unequally distant from the event. The latest, and, therefore, the one less likely to be well informed, gives the most abundant and the

With the exception of the limited time, too short for the complete satisfaction of Francis, he had obtained all that he desired. He hastened to carry the good news back to his brethren. They welcomed him warmly, and praised God with one voice for the favour He had shown them. It seemed to them as if God was not only making use of them for awakening faith in the souls of others, but that through them He would also extend the limits He had hitherto placed upon His mercy. It was their little chapel, their beloved Portiuncula, where they had all consecrated themselves to the Lord, which by an unheard-of privilege had become the instrument of this new effusion of grace and salvation. It had always seemed such a humble place, and now it was to shine with great brightness amongst all other sanctuaries. They thought over the best way of announcing the news to the world. We have just seen in the canon of the Lateran Council, that by the discipline of those days indulgences were oftenest granted on occasion of the consecration of a church. The same idea struck all the brethren. The Portiuncula must be solemnly consecrated, and at the ceremony, in the midst of the concourse of people who would be present, they would proclaim the great favour that our Lord and His vicar granted to the world. All agreed that it would be a fresh glory to S. Mary's. There was but one difficulty. Only cathedrals and basilicas were consecrated, and they might not obtain this privilege for a private chapel of small dimensions, and without any external beauty to recommend it. They decided at least to make the request, and Francis was preparing to return to Perugia for this purpose when he learned that the Pontifical court had just started again for Rome. The Chapter of S. Michael was too near for

most marvellous details. It is difficult to admit without reserve this progressive increase of embellishment. The era of legends was about to open with the *Fioretti*. I have followed the very circumspect criticism of the Bollandists. To them must those readers refer who are surprised not to read here of either the brambles or the roses of the Portiuncula. They will find satisfactory explanations in those authors.

him to think of following the sovereign Pontiff to the Eternal City, and when the Chapter was ended, other reasons unknown to us delayed his departure. He could not set out till the end of the year. He took with him the brothers Peter Catani,<sup>1</sup> Bernard of Quintavalle, and Angelo Tancredi. This time his request did not meet with many objections. The sovereign Pontiff, who at Perugia had granted him more than had ever been granted to anyone else, could not be otherwise than favourable to him in Rome on a less important point. The matter was quickly settled, and settled according to his desire. Another unexpected satisfaction that God bestowed on Francis was a second meeting with S. Dominic. The illustrious Founder of the Order of Preachers had arrived in Rome a few weeks before him. He had just told the new Pope that, obeying the instructions of Innocent III., and having conferred with his brethren in an assembly at Notre-Dame de Prouille, he had chosen the rule of S. Augustine. Honorius did not fail to carry out the ideas and promises of his predecessor. On the 22nd December he addressed: "To his dear son Dominic, Prior of S. Romain of Toulouse," a bull solemnly recognising the existence of the new Order. The two holy Founders had each obtained what they had come to ask for. Cardinal Ugolino, who had given useful help to both of them, summoned them to his palace; he had an important communication to make. We have said that this venerable Cardinal was interested in everything that could contribute to the advantage of religion. He had been one of the first to see that the present unpopularity of the Church was due to the wealth and feudal tenures of the clergy. He thought that the new Orders by returning to evangelical simplicity had found the true remedy for this, and he loved them on

<sup>1</sup> The presence of Peter Catani is to be noted. His presence, considered undoubted, has fixed the date of the Indulgence of the Portiuncula. He died on March 10, 1221. Up to that time Honorius had never returned to Perugia after his election, therefore it was at the beginning of his pontificate in 1216 that the Pope conceded the Indulgence.

that account. But at the same time he feared that this remedy would be a very slow one if it was merely held up as an example. The hoped-for results might perhaps be obtained more quickly. Since they were bishops who were chiefly implicated in the feudal system, why not choose bishops from among these religious who were bound by a special vow to poverty, and therefore must remain free from that system? This question was what now occupied the mind of Ugolino, and what he wished to discuss with the holy Founders. As soon as they came into his presence he proposed it at once to them in these words: "In the primitive Church the pastors were poor. They were men full of God, who served souls through charity and accepted no riches. Your brethren will follow these holy examples. They will be models. Why should we not make bishops and prelates of them?" We see how seductive a proposition this was. It seemed to answer the most urgent necessities of the day. But on the other hand, it might possibly compromise the work that was begun, by imposing on the two Orders a task which would divert them from their mission. The two Founders saw this at once, by that light which illuminates Saints and is so different from the light of politics. They looked at one another as if to see who would speak first. "My Lord," said S. Dominic, "my brethren are destined to preach; it is a great charge, if they understand it in its perfection, and so far as it depends on me, I will never allow them to desire any other." Francis, bending before the Cardinal, said: "My Lord, my brethren are called Minors, that they may never aspire to be amongst the great. Their vocation is to imitate the example that Jesus Christ has left us. If you wish them to bear some fruit in the Church, leave them in their condition, and, if need be, bring them back to it if they ever try to leave it. I fear that were they elevated to the prelacy they would be the more proud and insolent for having before been small and poor." The Cardinal yielded to these good reasons. He understood that an excellent institution may be ruined



by prematurely turning it away from its object, and he gave thanks to God that prudence greater than his own had prevented this sad result.

Now that the holy Founders had met, they continued their intercourse with each other. They could understand one another so well! God had led them by almost the same paths. Both had the same love to God, the same devotion to men, the same attachment to the Church, and on all these subjects they could converse together with delight. "Their conversation," say the historians, "was sweet as honey and the honeycomb." Then they began to talk of what was, properly speaking, the substance of their reformation, poverty, and here, though agreeing in principle, they differed in their ideas of carrying it out.

Ten years before, Dominic had heard his holy bishop, Don Diego di Azevedo, say to the Pope's legates, who arrived with a luxurious train of servants, and horses, and much apparel: "This, my brethren, is not the way you should act. It seems to me impossible to convince these men by words when they look for examples. Simple souls are being seduced by an imitation of evangelical poverty and austerity; by bringing them an entirely contrary spectacle, you will edify little, you will destroy much, and their hearts will never be touched. Oppose example with example, put true religion in the place of fictitious holiness. We can only triumph over the apparent humility of false apostles by practising genuine humility."<sup>1</sup> These weighty words had become his line of conduct. Like a good combatant, he had rejected everything that could impede his action. He had been seen going about from village to village, sometimes barefooted, always covered with a patched tunic, begging the bread he needed. His faith and his serious character both made him take pleasure in this poverty and privation. He felt that the conditions of higher virtue and more extensive

<sup>1</sup> Jourdain de Saxe, "*Vie de Saint Dominique*," ch. i. No. 16. These words confirm what has been previously noticed about the attraction exercised by the Albigenses.

influence lay in the perfect imitation of the lives of the Apostles.

But here he stopped. He had been led to poverty by the force of circumstances and by a sort of moral deduction, more than by direct attraction and spontaneous impulse. And so, when a family of brethren joined him, he never thought of imposing on them what he practised himself. He not only accepted important property that was offered him, but in the very bull of institution that had just been delivered to him, it was ordained, "that the goods already acquired by him,<sup>1</sup> and those which might be conceded to him by pontiffs, the bounty of kings and princes, and the oblations of the faithful, shall remain firm in his hands and in those of his successors." The Founder had not imagined that an Order could be established and increase and continue under the uncertainty of total destitution.

We know that the ideas of Francis were quite different. For him poverty was the chosen virtue of our Lord and of His Holy Mother, and therefore it had become the queen of all other virtues. It must be loved for its own sake. We have said how far Francis carried this love. He had espoused poverty for ever. To the end of time it would be the form of holiness peculiar to all the Minors. With these sentiments, Francis spoke from the fullness of his heart whenever the subject turned upon *his Lady*. He made a fascinating panegyric of her to S. Dominic.

The result was what always occurs when calm reason comes in contact with enthusiasm based upon truth, it is won by the beauty of the latter. Dominic bowed before this revelation of a state above what he had dreamed of. "O my brother Francis!" he cried, "I would that our two Orders were but one, and that we had the same rule of life in the Church!" Francis answered that diverse Orders responded to diverse aspirations of the soul, and Dominic,

<sup>1</sup> These properties are enumerated in the bull. They comprise "the place itself where S. Romain is situated with all its dependencies, the Church of Prouille with all its dependencies, the land of Cassanel, the Church of Notre Dame de Lescure with all its dependencies, &c."

filled with admiration for a poverty surpassing his own, begged Francis to give him what seemed to him best to symbolise that poverty, the cord that he used as a girdle. The humble Minor hesitated to grant this desire; it was too much honour, he said, for so small a thing; but Dominic insisted, so that he had to give way. With great delight, Dominic immediately girded himself with the cord, and for the rest of his life he religiously wore it under his tunic.<sup>1</sup> Then the holy Founders separated, after taking affectionate leave and recommending themselves to the prayers of one another. As he departed, Dominic seemed to be in a state of exaltation. "Truly," he said to those who were with him, "all religious men should place themselves under this holy man. He has carried virtue to perfection."

But Francis did not stay long in the Eternal City. He was in haste to return to Umbria to prepare for the ceremonies of the consecration of the Portiuncula. Honorius had not only authorised this consecration, but he desired that it should be done with great solemnity, and he had condescended to name seven bishops of the neighbourhood whom he charged with its accomplishment. Francis, who was always courteous, most probably carried this invitation to them in person, and these visits, which, according to his custom, he took advantage of for preaching, required a certain amount of time.

Pentecost of the year 1217 was approaching when he returned to Assisi. It was his custom to beguile the length of the journey by intervals of silence followed by lively sallies, often full of a supernatural spirit. We can believe, with some modern historians, that it was on this occasion that he addressed to his companion, Brother Peter Catani, these remarkable words, which his biographers have recorded, without assigning them any date: "I should not consider myself a Minor if I had not the disposition I am going

<sup>1</sup> This pious act was the starting point of a devotion that has spread through the Church, and that three centuries later Sixtus V. of the Order of Friars Minor, erected into an archconfraternity, under the title of *Archconfraternity of the Cord of S. Francis*.

to describe to you. We are on our way to the Chapter ; there I shall perform my functions as minister ; I shall preach, I shall give advice. Suppose that at the end of the meeting our brethren cry : This ignoramus, this nobody, will will not do for us any longer, we will not have him any more for our chief, because he does not know what to say or what to do ; and suppose that after these words they strip me and drive me away ignominiously, I tell thee in truth, if I do not hear all that without changing countenance, without the least loss of joy, without for a moment ceasing to wish to be a saint, I am not worthy to be called a Minor." And he forcibly recalled the principle which dictated these sentiments to him : "Honours are our perdition, praise exalts and ruins us, there is security for the humble and subordinate only."

The Chapter for which Francis was preparing in such a pure frame of mind, is an important one in the annals of the Order. Two measures were taken, which show how greatly the number of houses had increased. It was decreed that Italy should be divided into several great provinces, having a distinct government, though still dependent on that of the Portiuncula. There were to be six of these provinces each directed by a brother, who, putting aside the title of superior or master as being too pretentious, was simply to be called minister or provincial servant. Francis nominated Peter Catani for Umbria, Brother Elias for Tuscany, Bennet of Arezzo for the Marches of Ancona, John of Stracchia for Lombardy, Augustine for the Land of Labour, and Daniel for Calabria. The name of the minister for Apulia, a province that was then most likely scarcely formed, is not known to us.

The second of the resolutions agreed upon shows still better the progress and the wide hopes of the Order. It was decided that great missions conducted by one of the oldest of the brethren should go and preach poverty, and if possible, establish convents in the principal Catholic countries. Bernard of Quintavalle was to go to Spain, John of Penna



to Germany. A chronicle informs us that the latter was to take sixty brethren with him. Francis reserved France especially to himself, being drawn towards that country by a sympathy which he had imbibed with his mother's milk, and also, as he said, because its people had then the renown of being the one most devoted to the Blessed Sacrament.

It is quite reasonable to suppose that Francis kept all the brethren who had come to the Chapter, for the festival that was to be celebrated on the 2nd August at the consecration of the Portiuncula. The holy Founder would wish that, unless hindered by insurmountable obstacles, all his family should be present on so memorable a day. The ceremonies, always so imposing in themselves, were enhanced by great external splendour. Accepting the invitation they had received, the Bishops of Perugia, Todi, Spoleto, Foligno, Nocera, and Gubbio came to join the Bishop of Assisi. The latter, as Ordinary, accomplished the sacred rites. What must have been the emotion of the brethren, when, after the long prayers, they saw the holy oil poured on the altar and on the walls of their beloved chapel! They thought God was more present with them than before, and that He was sealing for ever His alliance with them. They repeated in their hearts the beautiful words which Israel had sung at the dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem: "Praise the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever." After the Holy Sacrifice which had succeeded the consecration, the bishops went in procession to a great tribune that had been erected outside the church. An immense crowd, collected from Assisi and the neighbourhood, surrounded them. Francis pronounced a discourse, in which all the fervour and gratitude of his heart overflowed. "He had more the aspect of an angel than of a man," the account given by the Bishop of Assisi says. At the conclusion he unfolded a paper that he held in his hand, and read these words: "I wish to make you all go to Paradise. I announce to you a Plenary Indulgence that I have obtained from the goodness of our Heavenly Father, and that the

Sovereign Pontiff has confirmed to me with his own mouth. All you who are here present to-day, who with a contrite heart have made a good confession, and have been absolved by a priest, you will have the remission of all your sins, and in like manner every year all those who come with the same dispositions will have the same. I had wished this to last for a week, but I could not obtain that."

After this announcement, all who assisted, bishops, brethren, and people, passed in succession into the chapel to be the first to receive the striking favour that had been offered to them. Not by thousands, but by tens and hundreds of thousands were they numbered who came from all quarters to seek in the chapel the entire remission of their sins. We see, what was strongly characteristic of that time, even towns that were at war with each other signing a truce that their citizens might not be prevented from gaining the indulgence. Before the century closed, Pope Boniface VIII. did an unheard-of thing; he named every year Nuncios charged expressly to take the direction of the pilgrimage, and to preach the indulgence to the multitudes. This incontestable fact seems to bear a signification that has been overlooked. It is well known that it was Boniface VIII. who, in the year 1300, instituted at Rome the first of those great indulgences which later took the name of Jubilees. The bull that announced it to the whole world invokes very vague and distant precedents. The true occasion of it may have been the report which the Nuncios brought of the wonders that took place at Assisi. Boniface, who was a man of action and zeal, may simply have desired to transport to S. Peter's, and to the centre of the Church, what, until then, had been the privilege of the chapel of S. Francis. This is only a hypothesis, but it seems probable. If it was so, we see how greatly the event we have been relating influenced the whole Church. Perhaps the world does not yet know all that it owes to S. Francis.

The brethren, invigorated by this extraordinary grace, as

by a fountain of life, left S. Mary's one after another to go and work with renewed ardour in the missions that had been assigned to them. Francis also soon set out for France. On reaching Florence he heard that Cardinal Ugolino had already been some months in that city in the quality of Legate of the Holy See. After all he had received from this eminent prelate, he could not do less than present himself to the Cardinal, and the latter expressed himself pleased at seeing him, and enquired the motive of his visit. Francis at once explained to him what he wished to attempt, but to his surprise the Cardinal did not at all encourage his ideas. He put before him that the duty of a superior is other than the duty of a simple brother ; that the place of every head is in the centre, not at the extremities. Francis, as we have before said, had rather a different notion of authority ; he thought it behoved him to set an example, as much or more than to direct and command. He answered the Cardinal : " I have sent several of my brothers to distant countries ; if I stay quietly in the convent without sharing their fatigues, it will be a disgrace to me ; and these good brothers who are suffering hunger and thirst amongst strangers will have reason to murmur, but if they know that I am working as hard as they are, their courage will be redoubled. Thus it will be easier for me to send others to similar missions." " And why," replied the Cardinal, " should you go to foreign lands at the cost of so much difficulty ? Is not Italy a field large enough for your labours ? " " My Lord," answered Francis, " you seem to think that God has raised up the Friars Minor for our provinces only, but I tell you, in truth, He has chosen and sent them for the good and salvation of the whole world. They will penetrate to the heathen and the infidels, and they will be well received by them and will gain numbers of them to God." " Perhaps so," continued the Cardinal, " but in any case you cannot go away without imprudence. Your Order is only just started, you know the opposition it met with at first, its adversaries are not yet all disarmed, your presence is necessary to defend and maintain

it." After this Francis made no more objections.<sup>1</sup> He doubtless thought that the prelate, whom he looked upon as an oracle, had made up his mind on the subject, and consequently he promised to stay, though he did not well see what he could do against covert attacks. In place of himself he sent to France, the country he desired to evangelise in person, brothers Pacificus, Angelo and Albert, the two latter from Pisa, most excellent religious, whom he ranked among his most faithful disciples. We know little of this mission. The brethren were exposed to hunger, cold, and all the other inconveniences likely to befall unknown strangers in a foreign country, destitute of everything and living an unusual kind of life. At night they went to the churches to say their Office and they spent the morning before the altar ; then if no one offered them food, they went and begged for alms at the doors. The rest of the day they passed in the hospitals, making the beds of the lepers and other sick people. This holy life at length attracted attention. Many men joined them and several establishments were offered them. The most considerable, as was the case in Italy, came from the generosity of the Benedictines. The Abbot and community of Saint-Germain des-Prés made them the gift of a convent, "that they might live there as guests." Brother Angelo of Pisa was its first guardian.

The Cardinal kept Francis in his palace for some time, and their mutual respect for each other was greatly increased by this life in common. Ugolino never ceased admiring in his guest the sacred flame that had been kindled at the fire that our Lord came to cast upon the earth, and the genuine holiness which, having God alone as its object, was so complete a satisfaction for the wants of those days. Francis, on his side, felt that he was in the presence of one of the most worthy representatives of the Church. That vigorous old age, that mind ever on the alert to seek, encourage and

<sup>1</sup> This conversation is not found in the biographies of the Saint. It is borrowed from the book of Conformities, liv. ii. conf. 6. It is so much in accordance with the characters of the personages, that we cannot but regard it as historic.



defend those who desired to do well, that activity, so wide and yet detracting nothing from the peace and seriousness of his heart, all these gifts attracted Francis, and their two souls united and attached themselves to one another. Still, each carried on his ordinary occupations. The Cardinal gave audiences, discussed affairs, and kept up the state of an ambassador and a prince of the Church. It was more difficult for Francis to keep to his usual habits, but he made no change from his accustomed life ; he prayed, he went out to preach, or to beg, sometimes he even brought back the alms he had received to the Embassy. It is related that one day when there were many people at table, he was eating the scraps he had begged for, when one of the guests made some good-humoured witty remark about his food. Francis was not put out of countenance ; he maintained that bread given in alms was truly angels' bread, and courteously told the guests that if they wished it, he would share it with them, that they might experience it for themselves. All, prelates, knights, and chaplains, accepted willingly. Some ate that bread sanctified by its origin, others put it aside to keep as a sacred thing. The Cardinal was somewhat mortified. After the repast he conducted Francis to his apartment. " Ah, my brother !" he said, as he embraced him, " Wherefore all this begging ? you affront me. Do you not know that my house is yours and your brethren's ? " " My Lord," answered Francis, " I have not affronted you, I think I have honoured you by imitating in your house Our Lord Jesus Christ who has taught us to love voluntary poverty. For indeed I intended only to follow the footsteps of our Master. Besides, I am convinced that it is better to sit at a table covered with the offerings of charity than at a sumptuous board loaded with dishes and meats without number." The Cardinal bowed his head. " Do, my brother, what seems good to you," he said, " the Lord is with you."

The origin of one of the fine Convents of the Order, S. Angelo di Pantanelli, on the borders of Tuscany and Umbria, dates from this sojourn of S. Francis at Florence. An

unhappy division existed in the then powerful family of the Lords of Baschi. The three sons of Ugolino di Baschi were in open rebellion on account of questions of interest, and as was usual in those times, they endeavoured to drag into their quarrel the numerous clients of their relatives and vassals. It was easy to see that much blood would be shed. Francis was greatly moved at this thought, and considered it a charitable act to interpose. He went successively to these hostile brothers, and by warm exhortations, and the irresistible charm that he always exercised, he succeeded in accomplishing the difficult work of making them lay down their arms. A charter of reconciliation, which so late as 1742 was in the archives of this noble family, was signed at his instigation. Ugolino, Buonconte, and Ranieri in it amicably settled the points that they had striven over, and undertook in the future to live in fraternal harmony. They wished to show their gratitude to him who had re-established unity amongst them. To the north-west of Baschi they possessed a steep hill called Pantanelli, crowned by fine trees, and sloping down to the banks of the Tiber. This peaceful quiet place was admirably suited for the life of the cloister. They offered to Francis to construct a monastery there if he would send some brethren to live in it. This he accepted, and the convent which was built soon afterwards, took the name of S. Angelo. It was here that in 1278, after a troubled life, there knocked at the door the most illustrious of the Franciscan poets, he who composed the *Stabat Mater*, Jacopo di Benedetti, better known by the name he has made famous of Fra Jacopone da Todi.

On leaving Tuscany, Francis entered the valley of Rieti. At Grecio he found the population in a daily increasing state of terror. During several summers an extraordinary hail-storm had ravaged the cornfields and vineyards, and as if that was not enough, in winter troops of famished wolves coming out of the woods attacked the flocks, and even men, in broad daylight. Francis, on his arrival, was welcomed as a friend and a saviour. The people surrounded him and

begged him to save the country. "Willingly," he said; "but listen well to what I am going to say. I pledge the honour and glory of God that if you will have pity on your own souls by making a good confession, and bringing forth worthy fruits of penance, He will take pity on you, and will deliver your country from these calamities, and will make it abundant in all good things. But I declare to you besides, that if you become ungrateful and return to your vomit, the divine anger will fall upon you, and your plagues will be greater than they are this day." The whole town believed the preacher, and began to do penance. Immediately the plagues ceased. Nothing more was heard of the wolves,<sup>1</sup> no more hail fell, and, what was more remarkable, says S. Bonaventura, when it hailed in the neighbourhood, the cloud, as it approached the territory of Grecio, was either dissipated, or turned aside to fall in another place. This state of things lasted, according to the Saint's promise, as long as they were faithful to God. Francis was rejoiced to stay among these people now that they had returned to good dispositions, and besides, the convent at the gates of the town fascinated him by the poverty that prevailed in it. This convent was built against a rock. Within this rock the Saint had discovered a fissure, of which he made a cell wherein he could retire and give himself up to contemplation. From time to time he felt the need of seeking God more intimately, and of conversing with Him as a friend with a friend.

From Grecio Francis regained Assisi, not in a straight line—he never took a direct course in his apostolic journeys—but deviating from side to side at the call of souls, or in obedience to the secret inspirations of God. He is believed

<sup>1</sup> It may be one of these wolves that became the wolf of Gubbio. After having related the fact we have mentioned above, a version of a poem of S. Francis, written at the end of the thirteenth century, and recently discovered at Versailles, adds:—

"Unus præcipue lupus ipso fertur agente  
Factus mansuetus villæque reconciliatum."

Perhaps the story in the *Fioretti* originated in this. Grecio is easily changed into Gubbio. The narrative seemed short and scanty, the clever writer wished to give it a dramatic form, according to his usual custom.

to have arrived at the Portiuncula for the Chapter of 1218. This Chapter, if it took place, is one of those that have left the least trace in the annals of the Order. It could not have been a large one.

Most of the brethren who had been sent to the various countries in Europe were still struggling with the difficulties of their task. These difficulties were so great that it was found that only a very small number amongst them would succeed in establishing themselves in the countries that had been assigned to them. And in fact a few months only had gone by when they began to return. They bore on their countenances the well-known trace of fatigue unsoftened by success. When questioned on the cause of their failure, they answered unanimously, "No one knows us; our costume, our isolation, excite mistrust. The clergy and the faithful have united either to drive us away because they took us for emissaries of the heretics, or to leave us without protection and defence. Thus abandoned, we have fallen into the hands of wicked men and thieves, who have ill-treated and robbed us. We had no resource left but flight." Those who came back from Hungary, Germany, and the northern provinces, expressed still greater discouragement. They alleged their ignorance of the languages. "We did not understand them, and they did not understand us," they said, "and the result was that strange mistakes were made which turned against us, and rendered our apostolate impossible."<sup>1</sup> The historians remark that there was much bitterness in all their complaints.

<sup>1</sup> The first religious who came to Germany knew but one word of German—*ja*. In the first town they entered, where their strange attire attracted a great crowd around them, they were asked if they wished for a lodging and some food. They answered, "*Ja*," and finding themselves well treated in consequence of this answer, they resolved to employ it on all occasions. Unfortunately, some one asked them if perchance they were heretics, and if they had come to Germany to preach another faith than the Catholic; to which they answered, "*Ja*." Immediately they were bound and thrown into prison, and after having been beaten and ill-treated in many ways, they were ignominiously driven out of the country. They returned at once to Italy, where their account inspired the other brethren with such terror, that they entreated God in their prayers to deliver them from the barbarity of the Teutons.



It was this bitterness that Francis first of all endeavoured to cure. He knew, as all masters of the spiritual life know, what ravages it makes in anyone who gives himself up to its suggestions. Take care, wrote S. Paul, lest any root of bitterness springing up do hinder, and by it many be defiled. Francis repeated this salutary advice to his children, and then he undertook to console them and to revive their courage. But he had been more wounded by all this than he allowed to be seen. Such a general check — for his envoys had only been able to establish themselves in Portugal — was a revelation to him. “All this,” he said, “is beyond the power of Francis.” He saw what he had not before thought of, that a corporation that has reached a point of development such as his had done, cannot sustain itself by its own resources. In a society where authority has such a prominent place, it is under necessity to seek external support in a closer union with the hierarchy. These thoughts occupied him for a long time, and, as often happens, they pursued him in his sleep. One night he dreamt that he saw a little black hen, with the feet of a dove, and with so many chickens that she could not shelter them all under her wings; some of the poor little creatures ran about round her finding no place of shelter and no warmth, and in danger of falling a prey to the weather or to violence. On awakening, he recognised himself in the hen. “Little I am in height,” he said, “black I have become in complexion, and a dove I ought to be in the simplicity and pureness of my intentions. By the divine mercy I have already children in great numbers, and shall in future have still more, whom I shall be powerless to protect. There remains, therefore, nothing for me to do except to place them under the holy Roman Church that she may cover them with her wings.” For several days he scarcely thought of anything else. He calculated the advantages to be expected from such high protection, if he could obtain it. All the ill-wishers outside would be powerless as soon as they knew that the Church had taken the Minors under her

patronage. "The sons of Belial," he said, "will no longer dare to ravage the Lord's vineyard. The Order will be sheltered from wicked attacks. Our brethren, as becomes the messengers of God, will everywhere find the liberty of action they require." Francis expected no less advantages within. We do not know that, as yet, there were any differences of opinion amongst his children. His penetrating eye, his prescience, as Celano says, may have perceived already the germs which were shortly to cause these differences? It seems so. "Holy Church," he said, "will espouse our poverty. The mists of pride will be unable to obscure the glory of humility. Should any maker of troubles arise, he will immediately be punished. The bonds of peace and charity amongst us will not henceforth be broken." A third advantage seemed to him likely to come from these two first. "Our brethren," he said, "will not be ungrateful; in return for this permanent assistance, they will be firmly united to the Church of Rome, they will keep close to her, as children keep close to their mother; they will live under her eyes, and they will be obliged to observe the Gospel in all its purity."

Francis was certainly more practical than he generally has credit for. Having found the principle from whence he expected assistance, he found what was more difficult, the application of this principle. He understood that he could not ask the Sovereign Pontiff to become the personal director of his Order, but he thought that if Honorius would consent to delegate part of his authority to one of the members of the Sacred College, the Cardinal invested with that authority, would be in an excellent position for *ruling, protecting, and correcting* an Order such as that of the Minors. Francis had decided to go to Rome to present the question in these terms, when he received a letter from Cardinal Ugolino. He had written to this devoted friend as soon as he knew of the ill-success of his brethren, to confide to him his troubles, and to implore the help of his wisdom. The Cardinal answered that such a serious matter must be

examined attentively, and in consequence he invited him to come as soon as possible to confer with him.

Francis set out at once, and as soon as he arrived, Ugolino gave him an audience. After having heard and approved of what was in his mind, the Cardinal said that Francis had a sure method for gaining his end, and that was to preach a sermon before the Pope and the Sacred College. Francis began by excusing himself: "I am nothing, and I know nothing," he said; but as the Cardinal insisted, he yielded, and promised to preach on an appointed day. The august assembly met; all were in a state of expectation. Francis had carefully prepared his discourse, and had even, contrary to his usual custom, learnt it by heart. But he had no sooner begun than his memory failed, he could not remember one word. There was a moment of anguish. The Cardinal Bishop of Ostia began praying silently, that the simplicity of this man might not cause him to be despised. Francis humbly acknowledged his misfortune, then for a moment he recollected himself, and burst forth with living, impressive words. The hearers were carried away at once. It was evident that it was not he who was speaking, but that the Holy Spirit was speaking in him. He seemed so entirely in the power of this Divine Spirit that he moved his hands and feet as though he would take flight. But no one saw anything ridiculous in that, there was so much authority, wisdom, and depth in all he said. Gradually the audience was overcome with emotion. According to the expression of Celano, the old Cardinals were like mountains suddenly shaken to their foundations; many of them wept with compunction and admiration.

After the sermon, Francis was presented to the Pope by Cardinal Ugolino. Encouraged by the favourable reception that was given him, he explained clearly the idea that had brought him to Rome. "Holy Father," he said, "no one can think without admiration of the works and labour that the government of the Church lays upon you. I am filled with confusion at the thought that we Friars Minor add still

more to these works and this labour. When I see so many eminent persons and holy religious who cannot be admitted to your presence, I ask myself if we are not presuming too much, we, the last comers, and the most miserable of the religious, when we knock at the door of the tabernacle of the strength of Christians, soliciting the honour of an audience from you. Therefore I entreat your Holiness to deign to grant us the eminent Bishop of Ostia as a protector and father (papa), so that henceforth, without violating the rights of your pre-eminence, my brethren may address themselves to him in their necessities." The Pope, with great kindness, granted what was asked of him, and Francis thanked him warmly. The holy Founder always thought this was an institution that would last, and exercise a beneficial influence over the destinies of the Order.<sup>1</sup> He recorded his desire in the last Rule which he wrote: "I enjoin all the ministers, in the name of obedience, to address themselves to the Lord Pope, that he may charge one of the Cardinals of Holy Church to govern, protect, and correct this fraternity; it is the best means that we have for keeping at the feet of this Holy Church, of remaining firm in the Catholic faith, and of always showing ourselves faithful to poverty, humility, and to the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ, as we have solemnly promised."

<sup>1</sup> We know that this idea proved so correct that it has become an ecclesiastical institution. Nearly all the religious families at this day have a Cardinal Protector.



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CHAPTER OF MATS, 1219-1220.

THE intervention of Cardinal Ugolino was felt almost immediately. At the entreaty of Francis he promised to preside in person at the Chapter that was to assemble at Assisi during the approaching Feast of Pentecost, and, on his part, he asked Francis to make the Chapter as plenary as possible. He would bring with him apostolic letters which should be given to the ministers of the different houses, and should serve to accredit them with the faithful to whom they should be deputed.

Express messengers were often sent to convoke the brethren to extraordinary Chapters, and there is no doubt that this method was employed for this one of 1219. Most of the brethren from foreign countries had returned, as we related in the former chapter, but those in Italy were scattered in the various provinces, and they had no idea that the reunion was to be of unusual interest. The good news was sent to them in order that they might come in great numbers. While awaiting their arrival, Francis and those who were with him set to work to make preparations for receiving a considerable assembly. We have mentioned how the town, at its own expense, had erected a spacious building, which had at first shocked all Francis' ideas of poverty.<sup>1</sup> Since the building existed in spite of him, he decided that it

<sup>1</sup> Page 134. We know now that this building had been erected in this very year, during the absence of Francis. Doubtless the intended visit of the Cardinal had determined the liberality of the town. The nobleman who, in the name of the Commune, prevented Francis from demolishing the construction, was the brother of a Minor, and was called Barton or di Bartona. He has the title of Seneschal of the Chapter. V. Th. de Eccleston, "De Adventu fratrum minorum in Anglia." Lond. 1858, page 26.

should be devoted to the use of the Cardinal and his suite. For the brethren, he had the idea of erecting in the valley a quantity of booths made of straw, reeds, and rushes woven together, in which they would find shelter as they arrived. The sight of these booths, arranged in symmetrical lines, soon excited the curiosity of the inhabitants of Assisi and the neighbouring towns. The report spread that something unusual was preparing. When they heard that there was going to be an important Chapter, they said that it would be a Chapter of Mats, and history has adopted this appellation.

The brethren soon began to arrive in troops ; they came in from the mountains and from the two ends of the valley. A place was assigned to each one. They were ranged according to the provinces, in groups of thirty, fifty, sometimes of eighty. When all were present, more than five thousand were enumerated, and yet the arrangements had been so well made that from first to last there was perfect order amongst this multitude. The brethren prayed and attended to their exercises as if they had been in their usual houses. Soon the arrival of Cardinal Ugolino was announced. The brethren formed in two ranks and advanced in procession to meet the prince of the Church. The venerable old man, though almost eighty years of age, had come from Rome on horseback. He dismounted a little below the Portiuncula, and to show the brethren that in becoming their protector he had made himself one of them, he covered his purple with the Minor's serge, and walked bare-footed as they did. He went thus to the chapel of S. Mary, prayed there for some time, and without wishing to take any rest, he requested to see how the brethren were lodged. He did not expect to find such perfect order ; he was delighted at the sight of all the booths, and turning to Francis he said : " But, my brother, this is indeed the Lord's camp." The next day, the day of Pentecost, he celebrated Pontifical Mass. Francis had claimed the honour of assisting him ; he filled the function of deacon, and chanted the Gospel. What must

have been the emotion experienced by the assistants ! The grand ceremonies, the consoling memories evoked by the festival, the presence of Jesus Christ descending into their midst at the voice of his minister, all was calculated to act upon their minds and to elevate them with faith and hope. Francis added to this impression by a sermon which has not been preserved to us, but of which we know the principal substance. As usual he went straight to the root of Christianity, and said in this wise : " My brethren, we have promised great things, and still greater things have been promised to us. Let us keep the one, and long after the others. Pleasure is short, the punishment that comes after it is eternal. Suffering is small, glory is infinite. All are called, few are chosen ; to each will be given according to his works." <sup>1</sup>

The end of the festival corresponded to this happy beginning. We have before said in what manner Francis conducted these general Chapters. He earnestly desired that they should be for all an occasion of spiritual refreshment. To attain this result the brethren must in great measure help themselves, as well as be much helped. On themselves depended private and public prayer, meditation, and that secret communion with God by which each one fortifies and animates all that is best within him. Francis offered himself as an auxiliary for the other part of the work. His devotion and penetration made him an excellent director, every one gladly had recourse to him, and he by his words, his sympathy, and his holiness, dissipated their doubts and strengthened their courage. He found an efficient support in Cardinal Ugolino. In this eminent man, virtue seemed to augment with increasing years. To the brethren, he was a very worthy representative of the Church, a strong pillar on which they might lean. An eloquent sermon he addressed to them, proved how greatly he had their spiritual progress at heart.

<sup>1</sup> In relating these words, Celano does not give them as pronounced at this Chapter. We follow the tradition represented by Bartholomew of Pisa and the *Fioretti*. It is in this case very close to history.

But it was principally the external organisation of the Order that the Cardinal made his business. He had interviews with all the chiefs of the missions, and in those conferences he communicated to them the light he had gained in his long experience in ecclesiastical affairs. He arranged with them and made Francis agree, that for the future, each of them could give the habit of the Order in his own province, on account of the distance from Assisi ; and to every one he gave a copy, with seal and authentic signature, of the letters he had obtained from the Pope in their favour. These letters were conceived in the most favourable terms : "*Honorius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the archbishops, bishops, abbots, deans, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical superiors.* As our beloved sons Francis and his companions in the life and religion of the Minors have renounced the vanities of the world, to embrace a life that the Roman Church justly approves, and as, following the example of the Apostles, they are going into all countries to cast in the seed of the divine word, we pray and exhort you all by these letters apostolic, to receive as Catholics the brethren of this Order, the bearers of these presents, who shall apply to you, to be favourable towards them and to treat them kindly for the honour of God and in consideration of us. Given the third of the Ides of June, in the third year of our Pontificate."<sup>1</sup> Together with this letter of such high authority, the Cardinal gave them others no less pressing, signed by himself and some of his colleagues of the Sacred College.

This *very general* Chapter, as it is sometimes called, was the occasion of a touching circumstance. We have seen that one of the maxims of the Saint was that there should be a compact between the faithful and the Minors. The Minors were to give the faithful an example of perfection, the faithful were to give the Minors the things they needed. Francis had depended on this compact on this occasion. He had thought more of sanctifying his brethren than of preparing

<sup>1</sup> Wadding, vol. i. p. 301.



food to support them. The population of the neighbourhood understood instinctively that he would act thus, and with the greatest delicacy and eagerness, without having been asked, they made it their duty to respond to the confidence he had placed in them. From the first days of the assembly, they were to be seen coming down from Perugia, Spoleto, Foligno, Assisi, bringing everything that the brethren could require. They came with carts laden with bread, wine, beans, cheeses, and other articles of food. Some had even thought of bringing napkins, jugs, glasses, and other utensils useful to a great multitude. He who could give most, esteemed himself fortunate, says the chronicle.

There was one man on whom this spectacle of an entire people putting themselves at the service of virtue made an extraordinary impression, and that was S. Dominic. He had come to this Chapter doubtless attracted by his increasing admiration for Francis, and also by that holy curiosity, which, his historians tell us, made him seek out all that was good in other communities besides his own. He must have been greatly struck by the holy improvidence of Francis; then when he saw how God took care of him, he found in it a lesson for himself. He threw himself at the feet of Francis, declared that he had sinned, and added, "Truly God takes special care of His holy poor, and I knew it not. Henceforth I promise to observe evangelical poverty in all its perfection." We can easily believe in this generous movement of one Saint towards another, and besides the Franciscan history, there are facts in S. Dominic's own life which justify this belief. Even after his meeting with Francis, in 1217, his brethren acquired property, with his consent, for the foundation of the convent in the Rue Saint Jacques at Paris. In 1219 things began to change. A certain Oderigo Gallicani, of Bologna, offered the preachers a house of the value of at least fifty pounds of the money of the country. The act of donation was drawn up, when Dominic arrived and tore it up in presence of the bishop. He ordered that they should live on alms only, and he even desired that the

alms should be gathered for one day alone. This is quite the spirit of Francis. Finally, in 1220, in Bologna itself poverty was made the definite law of the Order. At the request of the holy Founder, the brethren, assembled for the first time in a general Chapter, established by a perpetual decree, that they renounce every territorial possession, and will have no other resource except alms. The combination of dates leads us to see in this not a merely fortuitous coincidence, but points clearly to the Chapter of the Portiuncula as the origin of the movement.

The imagination of contemporaries was much stirred by this important and solemn Chapter. Legend has taken possession of it, and with such vigour, that, as usual, it oversteps history. According to the "Fioretti" for instance, Francis, learning that, in spite of his advice, many continued to inflict immoderate mortifications on themselves, ordered the brothers to bring him all the instruments of penance that they had in their possession. The number of iron breastplates and girdles that were heaped up before the Cardinal and him were more than five hundred ! The exaggeration is apparent. It could not have been possible, even in the Middle Ages, and in such a fervent reunion, to find heaps of such things. The truth is, that too many of the brethren did have recourse to this method of assuring the victory of the spirit over the body, and what is still more certain is, that Francis had a great objection to excesses of this kind. In fact, we have an authentic discourse which must have been pronounced by him in some Chapter. We may suppose that it was in this one, since tradition tells us that the subject was then broached. "We must," he said, "use great discretion in the treatment that we impose upon our brother the body, if we do not desire that it should excite in us a tempest of sadness. Let us frankly remove from it every cause of complaint. On this condition it can accept vigils and lend itself respectfully to our prayers. Otherwise be sure that sooner or later it will say, I am dying of hunger, your exercises are too much for me. Oh ! if, after it has received its pittance, it murmurs again,

then indeed we can remind it that we use the spur with the horse and the goad with the lazy ass."

The brethren returned to their convents full of consolation and spiritual joy. Only one important change had been made in the former ministers. John Parenti replaced Bernard of Quintavalle in Spain. But a great number of new provinces had been created. Brother Lucas was to go to Roumania and Greece, Brother Egidius to Tunis, and Brother Vital, with five others, to Morocco. Finally, Francis announced what must have seemed an event to the whole Order, namely, that he proposed to go himself to preach the faith to the Sultan of Egypt, and that he would take Brother Illuminato with him. Probably it was the result of all that had just taken place which made Francis conceive this project, and induced the Cardinal, who the year before had hindered his journey to France, to give his approval to it. Francis saw what force his Order would find in the assured protection of Ugolino, and relying on this protection with the confidence of a child resting on its mother's bosom, he thought that now was the favourable moment for executing the design he had always had in his heart. The Cardinal, on his part, had been astonished to find a regular well-disciplined army; he knew that such a force was proof against any ill-will that could be displayed towards it, and he saw no obstacle to Francis going for a time to the East to attempt the apostolic crusade that his generous heart demanded.

Faithful to the strategy recommended by Innocent III., the Christian armies had this time gone into Egypt to carry the war to the centre of the Mussulman empire, and it was in Egypt, with the intention of marching straight to the Sultan, that Francis landed. By a curious coincidence, the Crusaders amongst whom he found himself, were commanded by John of Brienne, brother to that Walter of Brienne under whom he had been on the point of fighting at the time that he aspired to military glory. If, as is most likely, Francis noticed this coincidence, he must have smiled to himself, and perhaps said to his companion that he seemed destined to meet this

family, but that his meeting with this brother would be in very different circumstances and with a very different purpose from what his meeting with the other would have been.

We know from an eye-witness what effect the humble monk produced on the brilliant army. Jacques de Vitry, then Bishop of Acre, wrote in his "Western History": "We saw Brother Francis, the founder of the Order of Minors, arrive; he was a simple man without letters, but very lovable, and dear to God as well as to men. He came to us when the army of the Crusaders was under Damietta, and was much respected by all." Less favourable was the impression the army made upon Francis. There was discord in the camp. The knights despised the men at arms, the men at arms retaliated, accusing the knights of treachery. The penetrating eye of the Saint may have detected these germs of weakness. In any case, it is certain that he expressed great fears from the first.

The Christians had just decided to issue from their lines and seek the Saracens on their own ground. "I know by revelation of the Lord," said Francis to his companion, "that they will be worsted in this attempt. But if I tell them so they will treat me as a madman; and, on the other hand, if I do not tell them, my conscience will accuse me. What do you think I ought to do?"—"My brother," simply replied Illuminato, who, according to S. Bonaventura, was a man of virtue and intelligence, "what does the world's judgment matter to you? If they say you are mad, it will not be the first time they have said so. Do not burden your conscience, and fear God rather than man." Francis followed this advice, and warned the Crusaders, but as he had foreseen, they laughed at his prophecy, and gave battle on the 29th August 1216, under overpowering heat. It was fatal to them. A feigned retreat of the Saracens, followed by a violent return attack, carried disorder into their ranks. Six thousand Christians were killed or taken prisoners. "By the light of this disaster," S. Bonaventura says, "they saw how wrong they had been in despising the wisdom of Jesus



Christ's poor man, for the eye of the just often discovers the truth better than seven soldiers posted as sentinels on the tops of the mountains." During the action, Francis had shown the greatest anxiety. "Look, look," he said to his companion; and when the rout took place, he did not think himself dispensed from compassion because he had predicted it. He wept for those whom he had wished to save. One of his historians remarks that, as a man capable of estimating courage, he spoke with special emotion of those who had fallen through being carried away by too fiery an ardour.<sup>1</sup>

Now that the combatants had failed, Francis deemed that his time had come. He declared his intention of going to the Sultan. The Crusaders tried to dissuade him. They represented to him that men could not pass from one camp to the other, that the war was without quarter, and the Sultan had even promised a gold besant to any one who should bring the head of a Christian. He answered that he wished to make the attempt, and that he did not fear death. But before setting out, he went with his companion to ask for the sanction of the Pope's Legate, who was in the camp.<sup>2</sup> A contemporary thus relates the interview: "Now I must tell you that two clerks were in the army which was at Damietta, and they came to the Cardinal. They said that they would go to the Sultan to preach, and they wished to go with his leave. The Cardinal said they should not go with his leave, for he knew well that if they went there they would not escape. Still they said, would he suffer them to go, and much they prayed him. When the Cardinal heard that they were in so great a mind to go, he

<sup>1</sup> Celano affirms that the Saint wept especially for the Spaniards, because they had exposed themselves so bravely that only a very small number survived. I have not related this detail, because the historians of the fifth crusade give no place to the Spaniards in the enumeration of the troops composing the expedition.

<sup>2</sup> There were two Cardinals with the Crusaders, Cardinal Pelagius as Legate, and Cardinal Pierre de Courçon, especially attached to the French. It was to Cardinal Pelagius that Francis went. He was not in favour with the Crusaders. They found him imperious and severe. Courçon was better liked. One expression of Guillaume de Tyr shows these different sentiments: "Then Cardinal Pierre died and Pelagius lived, which was a great pity."

said thus : I do not know your thoughts at all, but beware, if you go, that your hearts be always to God. They said they only wished to go for great good, if they could accomplish it. Then the Cardinal said that they could go if they wished. Whereupon they departed from the Christian host and went to the host of the Saracens."

Francis was full of confidence. "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me," he sang with the prophet king. They had not gone far when they met two little sheep. The sight rejoiced the Saint. "Be of good comfort," he said to his companion, "it is the accomplishment of the words of the Gospel : 'Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves.'" And truly the wolves were not long in appearing ; these were some Saracen soldiers, who, taking them for refugees, or envoys, at first let them go on quietly. But when they found that the brethren had no mission, and that they not only refused to abjure, but had come to preach the Christian religion, they ill-treated them and loaded them with chains. Francis kept his presence of mind. He knew only one word of Arabic, but that word might help him, and he made use of it. "In the midst of the blows he received, he cried, '*Soldan, Soldan,*'" says a contemporary chronicler. The plan answered. The Saracens understood that he was asking to be conducted to their chief, and they left off beating him.

The Sultan at that time was one whom the Arabs called Malek-Camel, the Perfect Prince. He had succeeded his father the preceding year, and if he was not perfect in all points, at least for a Mussulman he was not ferocious. When Francis and Brother Illuminato came before him, "they saluted him, and he saluted them ; then he asked them if they wished to be Saracens, or if they had come with a message. They answered that Saracens they would never be, and that they had come with a message from God, and to save his life, if he would believe them. For we say, that if you die under this law you are lost, and for that we are

come to you, and if you will listen to us and hear us, we will show you by clear reason, before the wisest men of your land, that you are all lost. The Sultan said that he had archbishops and bishops of his law, very good clerks, and without them he could not listen to what they said. The clerks answered: 'Of this are we right glad, send and fetch them.' The Sultan sent to fetch them, and they came to him in his tent, eight of the highest and wisest in the land, and the two clerks were there also. And when they were come, the Sultan told them why he had sent for them. And he related to them what the clerk had said. They answered, Sire, thou art expert in the law, and art bound to maintain and guard it; we command thee by Mahomet who gave it us, that thou have their heads cut off. For we will hear nothing that they say. For the law forbids us to believe in any preaching, and for this we command thee to have their heads cut off. Then they took leave and went away. The Sultan remained, and the two clerks. Then the Sultan came to them and said: Seigneurs, they have commanded me by Mahomet and by the law to have your heads cut off. For this the law commands. But I will go against the commandment. For else I should render you bad guerdon for having risked death to save my soul."<sup>1</sup>

In a second audience he went so far as to say he would give them possessions and lands if they would stay with him. At this proposal Francis thought he was in the presence of a soul that was half won over. "Yes," he replied, "if you will be converted with your people, I will willingly remain with you." And as though to give a final stroke, he added, "Your priests would not dispute with me, perhaps they would be more ready to act. Have a great fire lighted, I will go into the fire with them, and you will see by the result which faith is the surest and the holiest." "I do not think," answered the Sultan, "that any of my priests are inclined to face flames and torture for the defence of their faith." He said this because he had remarked one of them,

<sup>1</sup> *Continueur de Guillaume de Tyr.*

a man of years and experience, who had slipped away when he heard Francis' proposal.<sup>1</sup> This cowardice disconcerted Francis. He could not understand how a priest could refuse this proof of confidence in God ; but he did not stop there. "Well," he continued, "promise me that you and your people will embrace the religion of Jesus Christ, if I come out of the fire safe and sound, and I will go into it alone. If it devour me, let it be imputed to my sins, but if God's power protect me, then recognise that Christ is the power and wisdom of God, the true God and the Saviour of all men." The Sultan was astonished ; he was face to face with that absolute sincerity which always inspires profound respect. He might have said, as thirty years later his co-religionists said of S. Louis, that he had never yet met so proud a Christian. However, he would not accept the offer ; he gave it to be understood that his people would revolt rather than agree to such opinions.

At this decision, Francis retired. He was shortly followed by presents sent him from the prince. But the man of God, who had come to seek souls, not riches, despised them as though they were dirt, and sent them back. This contempt for what all men esteem, added still more to the Sultan's admiration ; and though he would not, or dared not, range himself under the law of the Gospel, he entreated the Saint to accept his presents and to take them for the poor and for the churches, in the interest of his salvation. Francis persisted in his refusal. He had a horror of the weight of money, and besides, in the Sultan's heart he saw no germ that could develope into real piety. He resolved to return to the camp of the Christians. His attempt had failed in two ways—he had not converted the infidels, and he had not shed his blood for the faith. God was reserving him for another martyrdom and another glory. "Oh ! truly happy man," cries S. Bonaventura, "who, spared by the sword of a tyrant, yet did not fail to resemble the Divine Lamb who was

<sup>1</sup> S. Bonaventura calls this Imam who escaped *virum authenticum et longævum*. In the whole of this paragraph the holy Doctor has been followed.



slain. Oh truly happy man, who fell not by the weapon of a persecutor, and yet received the martyr's palm !”

Francis stayed with the Crusaders till after the taking of Damietta, which happened on the 5th November. His expedition to Malek-Camel had raised rather than lowered his prestige with the Crusaders. . Wherever he went, people flocked to hear him. Recruits, such as he had never expected to gain, began to come in. We can judge of their quality and their numbers by a precious fragment of a letter that Jacques de Vitry wrote to his friends in Lorraine about the end of 1219: “Master Reynier, prior of S. Michel, has entered the Order of Friars Minor. This Order is making rapid progress in the world, because it exactly reproduces the form of the primitive Church, and closely imitates the life of the Apostles. The superior of these brethren is Brother Francis, a man of such goodness that all hold him in veneration. After he came among us, so great is his zeal, that he did not fear to go to the army of our enemies, and preach, during several days, the word of God to the Saracens. He had not much success, but on his departure, the Sultan, the King of Egypt, asked him secretly to pray for him, that he might be guided by an inspiration from above and attach himself to the religion most approved of by God. Colin the Englishman, one clerk, and two other of our companions, to wit Michel, and Master Mathieu, to whom I had entrusted the care of my Church, have also entered the Order of Minors, and I can hardly keep back the Cantor and Henry and several others. As to myself, with my body weakened and my heart oppressed by all these separations, I aspire to end my life in peace and quiet.” We see that even when Francis failed in one matter, he had success in others that most men would have considered important. He was, like all God's true workers, more powerful than ever in the midst of weakness.

He was so well convinced of this, that all his life he felt confident that he had opened a way that ought to be followed, and indeed would be followed, by his children. He has left us a

proof of it in the two rules that he wrote and that we still possess. Both contain a chapter entitled : *Of those who go amongst the Saracens*. This is how the chapter runs in the first : " Our Lord said : I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves. All the brethren, who in obedience to these words, desire by God's inspiration to go amongst the Saracens or other infidels, can go with the permission of their minister and servant. And the minister shall not refuse this permission to any such as he shall deem fit for this function. The missionaries will have two ways of conducting themselves spiritually in the midst of strangers. The first will be, to avoid all contention and disputes, to show themselves submissive for God's sake to every human being, and simply to profess that they are Christians. The other way will be, to announce the divine word when they think that God requires it of them : they will preach one God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all things, Jesus Christ the Saviour and Redeemer, baptism, the necessity of being Christians, etc. They will remember, wherever they may be, that they have given themselves, that they have devoted their bodies to the Lord Jesus, and that through love to Him, they must expose themselves to His visible as well as to His invisible enemies, because He has said : he that shall lose his life for my sake shall save it."

There is a tradition, well accredited in the Order, that before returning to Europe Francis visited Syria and the Holy Places. His great devotion to our Lord makes this assertion most probable, and it seems still more so when we remember that at the Chapter of Mats he sent a mission to those lands under the conduct of Brother Lucas. But as we have no positive documents in proof of it, it is a probability that the reader can take as he pleases. In the same way he can take a reflection which seems to us the natural conclusion of what we have been relating. Seventeen years later, in that same Syrian mission, John of Brienne, the commander of the Crusaders, the paladin of

fortune, who, after having fought, say the chronicles, better than Hector, Roland, and the proud Judas Maccabæus,<sup>1</sup> and had become King of Jerusalem and emperor-elect of Constantinople, received the Franciscan habit at the hands of Bennet of Arezzo, who had succeeded Brother Lucas. It is natural to think that this noble act, terminating a noble career, was partly due to the remembrance of Francis, who, by the power of holiness alone, had dominated the chief of the terrible enemies of the Christian name.

Francis returned to Italy at the beginning of the spring of 1220. There is no doubt that he landed at Venice. S. Bonaventura represents him wandering on one of the islands in the lagoons that surround the city. Birds were singing amongst the flowering shrubs. Francis said to his companion: "Our brothers the birds are singing to their Creator; let us go among them and sing the praises of the Lord." The birds, far from being frightened, continued singing, so that Francis and his companion could not hear themselves. "My brothers," said Francis to them, "be so kind as to stop your singing until we have recited our hours." The birds immediately became silent, and did not sing again till, when the Office was finished, Francis gave them leave to do so.<sup>2</sup>

A more serious fact is connected with his passage through this country. He and his companion were overtaken by the darkness of night. On the one side was the Po, along

<sup>1</sup> "N'aie Hector, Roll'ne Ogiers,  
Ne Judas Machabeus li fiers,  
Tant ne fist d'armes en estors,  
Comme fist li rois Johans al jors."

(Philippe Monskes, cited by Ducange, "*Histoire de Villehar douin*," page 224.)

He was always much in men's minds. They said that he was the marvel of knights. There was even a song on this subject, half Latin and half French, which was very popular. Salimbene, who gives this detail, says that he has often sung it ("*Chronica*," page 16).

<sup>2</sup> The circumstance took place in one of the islands of the lagoons, called the island *of the Desert*. At this day there is a convent on it called S. Francis of the Desert.

whose banks they were going, on the other a number of little water-courses, intersecting the valley and making their road dangerous. "We are in a bad case," cried his companion; "pray to God to bring us out of it." "My brother," replied Francis, "if it seem good to Him, He can send light to illuminate this darkness." Scarcely had he spoken when they were enveloped in a bright light. They distinctly saw, not only the road, but a certain portion of ground around them, though the rest of the land was hidden in obscurity. They followed the celestial light, singing the praises of God.

At length they reached Verona; there they rested some days, and then continued their journey to Bologna the Learned, as it was then called. The burning climate of Egypt and the long sea voyage had fatigued Francis extremely. His health was shattered, he could hardly stand when he set foot in Italy, and these long journeys on foot had completely exhausted him. They were obliged to find an ass for him to ride to enable him to reach his destination. His companion, Leonard of Assisi, who had been noble in the world, continued on foot. He began to feel wearied on the road, and weariness, as sometimes happens, inspired him with a bad thought. He said to himself: "Our ancestors would never have lived together as equals, and now he is riding and I have to lead his beast." He was full of this thought, when Francis suddenly dismounted. "No, my brother," he cried, "it is not right that I should ride and you should walk, for you were formerly much nobler and more powerful than I." Brother Leonard blushed with shame at finding his thoughts thus discovered. He threw himself at his superior's feet and asked his pardon, confessing that he had sinned through pride.

In spite of his desire, it nearly happened that Francis passed by Bologna without setting foot in it. He had begun to feel anxious on the way, hearing that the brethren had added important constructions to the humble house



given to Bernard of Quintavalle by the lawyer Pepoli. As he approached, an inhabitant of the town unintentionally put the finishing stroke to his sadness, by talking of what he called the Friars' house. These words, *the Friars' house*, were taken by the strict lover of poverty as an indication that property was publicly attributed to them. He declared that it was a deviation from the rule, and to avoid participating in it, he would go elsewhere to beg for hospitality.

This indirect blame did not seem to satisfy him ; he sent his companion to the too luxurious monastery to command them all, in the name of obedience, to come out of it at once. The brethren came out without making any excuses, even the sick were carried and placed for a time in the street. "He who writes this history," says Thomas of Celano, "was one of the number ; he was taken out of his bed and laid in the street like the others." We can imagine the effect of such a vigorous proceeding. Fortunately, Cardinal Ugolino, who is always to be found everywhere, because he was the moving spirit of diplomacy under Honorius, was in the city. Hearing of what had taken place, he went directly to Francis and, after much trouble, succeeded in pacifying him. He would never have done so had he not formally assured him that the house was his and in no way belonged to the Friars. Till then Francis had been implacable ; he declared that all his work would be upset if the Minors could become proprietors. Now that he had saved the principle, he allowed the brethren to return to the house ; he even promised to go and stay there, and what cost him less, to preach once in the city.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He seems to have delayed accomplishing this promise for a while. Cardinal Ugolino, finding him exhausted with fatigue, proposed to go and make a retreat with him at Camaldoli, with the children of S. Romualdus. Francis willingly agreed, and the two friends remained more than a month in this holy solitude, giving themselves entirely to pious conversation and meditation on heavenly things. The cardinal occupied a cell at the entrance of the desert ; it is still to be seen. Francis occupied another near it, which had been inhabited by S. Romualdus. It has since been called the cell of S. Francis, and no one but the Prior of Camaldoli may use it.

As soon as they knew that he was coming, there was the greatest excitement amongst the populace. No one had seen him or knew him, but his fame had gone before him and prepared everybody to receive him. They had heard him spoken of as a worker of miracles, and now they wished to honour the bold missionary who had attempted a crusade alone, and had, it was said, gained such power over the enemies of the faith, that their chief had bowed his knee at the name of Jesus Christ. The ardent youth of the schools were especially enthusiastic for the austere and popular reformation to which Francis had attached his name. The Professors of the University, with the learned interpreter of the Pandects, John Pepoli, at their head, went further than their pupils; they began to suspect and to say that this reformation, by elevating men's minds, would prepare the renovation of the Church and of Italy. Thus the whole city was unanimous in going to meet Francis. As soon as he came in sight, there were repeated acclamations, and an immense crowd forming behind him accompanied him to the market place where he was going to speak. We have the testimony of one who was present at his discourse; we give it as it has been extracted from the archives of Spalatro by Sigonius, the learned historian of the Bishops of Bologna: "I, Thomas, citizen of Spalatro and archdeacon of the cathedral church of that same city, studying at Bologna in the year 1220, on the day of the Assumption of the Mother of God, saw S. Francis preach on the square before the little palace, where nearly the whole town was assembled. He spoke first of angels, of men, and of devils. He explained the spiritual natures with such exactitude and eloquence that his hearers were astonished that such words could come from the mouth of so simple a man. Nor did he follow the usual course of preachers. His discourse resembled rather one of those harangues that are made by popular orators. At the conclusion he spake only of the extinction of hatred, and the urgency of concluding treaties of peace and compacts of union. His garment was soiled and torn, his person mean,

his face pale, but God gave his words unheard of power. He even converted noblemen, whose unrestrained fury and cruelty had bathed the country in blood ; many of them were reconciled. Love and veneration for the Saint were universal ; men and women thronged around him, and happy were those who could touch so much as the hem of his habit."

The holy joy of an apostolate thus blessed by God, made Francis forget all his fatigue and sadness. This time it was crowned by an event that filled Bologna with wonder and edification. Professor Pepoli suddenly declared his intention of renouncing his chair and the world. His numerous friends and the magistrates of the city did all they could to keep him to his beloved studies, and, as they said, to glory, but without success. That grace, which an attentive eye might have seen growing within him for some years, was too strong. He went to Francis and humbly begged to be admitted into the number of his sons. Francis welcomed him with that exquisite mixture of deference and cordial charity that he always showed on such occasions. He himself clothed him in the habit of the Order, and with his consent the new brother remained in the convent that he had formerly given, and became an honour to it by his virtues. His religious life lasted only too short a time. He died in the odour of sanctity in 1229, three years after him whom he had venerated in his life, and whom he was enabled to venerate as a Saint after his death.

Together with Pepoli, Francis received into the Order two young students, Pellegrino di Fallerone and Richer of Modena ; then he set out to arrive at the Portiuncula in time to prepare the Chapter that was to assemble there at Michaelmas. He stayed at Florence only as long as was necessary to visit a convent that a noble lady of the family of the Ubaldini had opened at Monte Coeli the previous year. The little community was full of fervour, but it felt its inexperience, and wished to be directed by a religious who had been trained in the spirit of the

Order at its source. They entreated Francis to grant them one of the sisters S. Clara was forming at S. Damian. He approved of the desire, and as soon as he returned to Assisi he thought how he could satisfy it. His choice fell upon Clara's sister, Agnes, whom we saw as a child so full of courage, and notwithstanding her youth (she was hardly two-and-twenty), Francis considered her equal to this delicate and difficult task. The two sisters, on learning his resolution, broke the sweet bond that united them without a word of complaint; but a letter that Agnes wrote from Florence a few days after her arrival enables us to measure the greatness of the sacrifice that had been imposed on them. We here insert the letter.

*"To her venerable mother, to her mistress in Christ, the well-beloved Clara, and to all her community, Agnes the humble servant of Jesus.*

"The condition of created things is that they never remain in the same state. When we imagine ourselves at the height of happiness, we are plunged into an abyss of sorrow. Know then, my mother, that in the depths of my heart there is great trouble and immense sadness. How I suffer in being separated from you, you with whom I thought I should live and die! Now this misfortune has begun, I know not when it will end. It is one of those things which go on continually, and of which one sees no end; it is like a great shadow growing indefinitely, never decreasing. I thought those who were united by the same faith and the same consecration would have the same life upon earth and the same death, that the same tomb would enclose the same blood and the same profession; I was mistaken; behold I am alone, abandoned; my soul is overflowing with grief.

"Oh my sweet sisters, pity me, weep for me, and pray God not to let you suffer thus. Understand that there is no sorrow like this sorrow, it is torture that crucifies me, a ceaseless fire that devours me. I am oppressed on all sides. Pray aid me with your pious prayers, that God may give me strength to bear it. Oh my mother! what shall I do? what shall I say? I who never hope to see you or my



sisters again. Oh! that I could express what I feel, that I could open my heart to you in this letter! My soul is overwhelmed with the weight of affliction. I groan and I weep. I seek consolation and I find none. I bring forth sorrow upon sorrow, and I cannot bear the thought that I shall never see you again. No one here can understand my trouble.

“One thing comforts me and you can rejoice with me for it, it is the great unity that reigns in this community. They have promised obedience to me with respect and devotion. They all recommend themselves to God and to you. Think of us, and regard them as well as me as daughters and sisters who will always be disposed to follow your advice and execute your orders. Beg Brother Elias from me to visit us and console us oftener. Adieu.” (Wadding, tom. ii. p. 15.)

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE MARTYRS OF MOROCCO, 1220-1221.

FRANCIS returned to the Portiuncula after an absence of fifteen months. Since he landed at Venice he had seen for himself, and had been informed by the ministers, that in Italy the Order was progressing with its work to the satisfaction of the people. But he was almost in total ignorance as to the fate of the missions that he had for the second time sent into Catholic countries. It was a great consolation to him to hear that in this new attempt they had found none of the difficulties which had forced them to give up the first. The experience of that repulse had made them better prepared in the conditions necessary to success, and the kind solicitude of Cardinal Ugolino had accompanied them and carefully made their way smooth for them.

In France, for instance, the eminent prelate had come forward several times to remove doubts that still prevailed. Fresh letters from Honorius, evidently written at his request, had been addressed to all the archbishops, bishops, abbots, and prelates of the kingdom, placing the new missionaries under the direct protection of the Holy See. "We have already written to you on the subject of our dear brethren of the Order of Minors, that, for the love of God, you should regard them as recommended to you. But as we learn that several amongst you still have scruples of conscience concerning the members of this Order, so that you will not let them be established in your dioceses, notwithstanding our letters which ought to put them above all suspicion, and although, according to credible witnesses, they themselves have done nothing to rouse suspicion, we

again notify to each of you that we hold this Order approved, and that we recognise its members as Catholics and people of a holy life. Therefore we think it our duty to warn you, and, if need be, to enjoin you by this apostolic rescript, to admit them in your dioceses as true religious, and to hold them in consideration, in deference to God and to us."

A letter written in nearly the same terms had been sent some time before to the Archbishop of Sens and the Bishop of Paris. The two prelates were probably personally acquainted with Cardinal Ugolino, and the latter desired to interest them specially in his *protégés*. There seems no doubt, though we have no direct testimony to prove it, that what had been done for France was done for the other kingdoms also. Thanks to this acknowledged protection, the Minors began to take root all over Europe, and though in the more distant countries the germ at first must have been very small, it soon began to increase. Francis knew by experience that it is good for a work to begin in humility, and he praised God with his whole heart for the results already obtained.

One mission only had not succeeded—that which had been sent to the Moors in Spain; but God had cast such glory over this defeat, that no success could have rejoiced Francis more. The ancient land of Africa, as in the days of Cyprian, had received the seed while drinking the blood of those who brought it. The Brothers Berard of Carbio, Peter of San Gemignano, Otho, Adjutorius and Accurtius had been martyred. We can imagine the feelings of Francis when he heard this news. Five of his sons had then rendered this testimony of blood which he had gone to the East to offer to God, and the grace had been refused to him! He had the names of these heroes and saints repeated to him. He pronounced them with religious respect. "Ah! these are our first fruits and glorious flowers of the Minors," he said, and he asked to be told all the details of their passion and martyrdom. His desire could be granted.

An authentic account, written by the Bishop of Lisbon, and the minister of the Friars Minor, from the deposition of an eye-witness, an officer of the Infant Don Pedro, had just been received at the Portiuncula. This is an abridgment from the text afterwards printed of its contents, that were read or related to S. Francis.<sup>1</sup> The mission had had difficulties from the first. On its arrival in Spain, its chief, Brother Vital, fell ill, and his attack was so serious that he was obliged to resign himself to let the missionaries start without him, under the direction of Brother Berard. Going by way of Portugal, the latter led his little company first to Coïmbra, where they were well received by Queen Urraca, then to Alanquer, where they found protection from Sancha, the king's sister. From this town they started for Seville, where the Saracens were still in possession. For a week they remained hidden in the house of a Christian, as though wishing first to reconnoitre their position, or rather, as though taking time to furnish themselves by prayer with spiritual armour. When they felt assured that God was with them, they ventured on a bold step; they presented themselves in a mosque while the Mussulmans were at prayer. At the sight of these men in their strange costume, the Mussulmans took them for madmen, and merely drove them out rudely. Repulsed there, the missionaries went to another mosque larger than the first, and met with no better reception. They thought that their want of success was due to their not having aimed high enough. "Let us go to the chief," they cried; "if we gain him, the victory over the others will be easy." Then they went to the palace and presented themselves as envoys from the King of kings, and preached openly against Mahomet. Surprised and irritated at such audacity, the Moor ordered them to be taken by force and beheaded; but on the remon-

<sup>1</sup> Probably the account was read to Francis. Giordano di Giano says in his "Chronicle" that the authors had inserted some words in praise of the holy Founder. He was surprised and grieved when he heard this praise, and forbid the account to be read in future. "We must," he said, "be proud of what we have suffered ourselves, not of what others have suffered."—"Analecta Franciscana" tom. i. p. 3.



strance of his son, he revoked the sentence and had them shut up in a tower. The intrepid missionaries mounted to the top of the building, and there, as from a pulpit, they preached the faith of Jesus Christ to those who were passing in the street. On hearing this, the Moor understood that they were the kind of men who cannot be stopped. He had them brought before him again, and after trying, without much hope of success, to seduce them by the offer of riches, he condemned them to be carried to Morocco with a certain number of Christians.

This exile filled the missionaries with joy. At last they would set up the cross in an infidel land ; and an unexpected piece of good fortune that awaited them on landing made them think that God was leading them to success. The brother of Alphonso of Portugal, the Infant Don Pedro, in consequence of some dissension he had had with the king, had come to seek refuge at the court of the Miramolin. His renown and his bravery had soon won all hearts to him, and though a Christian, he was placed at the head of the Mussulman army. Faithful to the spirit of his family, he did not hesitate to give a public welcome to the missionaries, and he promised to assist them, only begging them to be very prudent, so as not to draw on themselves fresh persecution. This they promised. They were sincere, but an impulse they could not control carried them away. They went out of the Infant's palace the next day, and began to preach Jesus Christ in the streets. A few days later, Brother Berard, the one who understood Arabic the best, was speaking to the people from a cart, when the Moorish king passed by on a visit to the tomb of his ancestors. Instead of stopping, as a Mussulman would have done, Brother Berard became more vehement. To the prince this seemed great insolence, and when he was told that they were Christians who were preaching their religion, he ordered them to be immediately sent back to their own country. The Infant Pedro, more grieved than surprised at this order, did not desert them ; he gave them guides to accompany them to Ceuta, where they

were to embark. The missionaries escaped from these guides, whose business was rather to protect than guard them, and returned secretly to Morocco. Their return soon transpired. The Miramolin considered his authority had been insulted, and ordered them to be thrown into prison. There they passed twenty days suffering great privations, and then they were released, because the country became a prey to so many evils that people attributed them to this unjust imprisonment.

The Infant Pedro now came to the rescue. He was on the point of conducting an expedition against some rebellious tribes. He asked permission to take them with him as chaplains for the Christians who were amongst the troops, and the prince gave them to him. Such expeditions were then very much what they are in these days. Victory usually was not a difficult matter to obtain, but the marches were full of perils of all kinds. On its return the army had to cross a portion of the desert. For three days they had seen no oasis and no spring of water. Men and horses were dying of thirst. Brother Berard prayed, and then, trusting in God's help, he struck the ground with his stick. A spring burst from the soil, men and animals ran to it to slake their thirst, and the skins were filled for the rest of the journey. Admiration was general; the Moors even kissed the feet of the saint who had worked the miracle.

This unexpected popularity filled the missionaries with hope. When they got back to Morocco, it was impossible to restrain them. They not only preached to the people, but they waited in the streets for the prince when he was to pass by, and preached to him. Such audacity could not fail to be their ruin. The prince finding them incorrigible, gave an order to one of his officers named Albozaïda to put them to death. This officer had been a witness of the miracle in the desert. Inspired by a secret sympathy, he thought that by delay he might reconcile them with the king, and, notwithstanding the order he had received, he merely had them shut up. After a few days he endeavoured to persuade them to greater prudence, and to promise to leave off preaching.

They were immovable. "We must preach," they replied. Then Albozaïda left them to their fate. The executioners came, and their torments were terrible. They were dragged through the streets with cords round their necks, and beaten with such violence that their entrails were exposed ; they were rolled over pieces of glass and broken tiles, and when evening came, vinegar was poured upon their bleeding wounds to increase their sufferings. Not one of them gave way under this cruel ordeal. They smiled at pain, and blessed God like the young men of old in the furnace. In the middle of the night a great light enveloped the prison. The guards ran thinking the prisoners had escaped, and found them full of calmness praying to God.

The king, when he heard of all that had taken place, wished to see them, perhaps with the secret intention of pardoning them. His first words, however, were somewhat rough : "Are you the impious men who despise the true faith, the madmen who blaspheme the prophet of the Lord?" "O king!" they answered, "far from despising the true faith, we are ready to die for it ; it is true that it is not your faith, and that we hate the wicked man whom you call the envoy of God." These words did not seem to offend the Miramolin, he even tried to gain them by a method that he judged would be efficacious. He sent for some richly-dressed women. "If you will follow the law of Mahomet," he said, "I will give you these women for wives, and you shall be powerful in my kingdom ; if not, you shall die by the sword." "Prince," answered the confessors, "we want neither you nor your women nor your honours. Be such things yours, and Jesus Christ ours. Make us suffer all your tortures ; kill us. Pain will be light to us, because we look to heaven." This proud attitude exasperated the tyrant. He got up, and seizing his scimitar, cleft their heads like a common executioner. It was the 16th January 1220.<sup>1</sup> Their bodies were mutilated

<sup>1</sup> Fleury finds the conduct of the holy missionaries extravagant. S. Cyprian, he says, would not have recognised them as martyrs. Doubtless the grave historian understands the love of God, but he thinks it ought to be under control. The Church honours a somewhat ill-regulated love. True psychology is on the Church's side. *Amor volat, currit ; amor modum sæpe nescit.*

and dragged in the mire by the infidels. The Infant Don Pedro at length got possession of the precious remains, and enclosed them in two silver shrines, and resolving to have nothing more to do with the enemies of Christianity, he embarked to return with his treasure to his own country. King Alphonso went out to meet the holy relics as soon as they came to Coïmbra. The court and the town made a grand procession, and they were carried to the church of the canons regular of S. Cross with great rejoicing.

Francis gave the most earnest attention to this account ; admiration and respect were expressed on his countenance. At the end he could not restrain his emotion, and turning towards Portugal, he saluted and blessed the convent of Alanquer, from whence the brethren had started to their martyrdom. "O holy house!" he cried, with tears in his eyes, "O sacred land! in these torments you have offered to the Lord beautiful empurpled flowers of an odour most sweet. O house of God! may you be always inhabited by faithful observers of the Gospel."

What would the holy Founder have said, could he have known that from the blood of these martyrs, as from a seed, there was born to him a son upon those distant shores, one who, after astonishing Italy by his virtue and eloquence, was one day to defend his ideas and his works against his accusers in presence of the Sovereign Pontiff! Amongst the canons of S. Cross at Coïmbra there was one, then aged twenty-five years, a descendant of the illustrious race of Bouillon.<sup>1</sup> He was called Fernandez. Ardent, striving after perfection and sacrifice, he was from the beginning one of those who paid fervent homage to the relics deposited in the church of his Order. "In presence of those relics," his historian says, "he became like the elephant when it is excited by blood." His heart melted at the outrage inflicted on Christ, and the murder

<sup>1</sup> His father was named Martin de Bouillon. It is considered undoubted that he was of the line of the valiant chief of the first crusade, Godefroy de Bouillon. Probably some member of this family had been amongst the knights who accompanied Henry of Burgundy when he conquered Portugal from the Moors.



of His servants. It seemed to him that he would have done nothing until he in his turn should have braved some tyrant. He felt no fear. "Oh! if I could but have part in the crown of these martyrs," he said. "Would to God that I might one day receive the stroke of the executioner, on my knees for love of His Son!"

These thoughts occupied his mind for a long time; they came to him by night and by day; he was possessed with the vision of martyrdom. He could not long retain this secret in his heart. Not far from the town, the Minors had a hermitage called S. Antony of the Olives, because it was under the patronage of the father of Anchorites, and was situated in the midst of a grove of olive trees in a beautiful position. They were not much versed in letters, but, as the chronicler well remarks, that which is best in letters lived in their hearts and was expressed in their virtues. Fernandez opened his mind to them one day when they had come to the canons' house to beg for bread which they needed. "If I became one of you," he said, "would you send me to the country of the Saracens, that, like your holy martyrs, I, too, might shed my blood for the faith?" It was to be one of the points in the Rule, and it was then the express wish of Francis, that his people should always go and preach the Gospel to the infidels. The brothers answered Fernandez, telling him of this wish of their Founder. "If it is so," he replied, "bring me the habit of your Order as soon as you can; I have the greatest desire to take it." These words filled the Minors with joy, because they knew the merits of the postulant. They came back the next morning bringing the habit of the Order as they had promised. Fernandez put it on without any pomp or ceremony in a corner of the canons' house; then leaving S. Cross, he went into the bosom of his new family, his heart filled with hope. He stayed there some months, time enough to change his name to that of Antony, to initiate himself in the Rule, and to pronounce the vows. Then he bade adieu to his country for ever, and

embarked for the lands where he hoped to fight a good fight.

Almost at the same time that Antony set sail for Africa, Francis was presiding at the general Chapter of Michaelmas at Assisi. Three measures of unequal importance mark this Chapter.

First. Some changes were made in the chiefs of missions and provincial ministers. The resignation of Brother Lucas, provincial of Roumania, was accepted, and his place taken by Bennet of Arezzo, of the noble family of Sinigardi, formerly provincial of the Marches of Ancona. For the government of the latter province a brother was appointed, whom Celano, probably referring to his noble origin, designates as Lord Paul.

Secondly. Communication was made of a Brief of Honorius, dated from Viterbo, the 22nd September 1220, and addressed to all the *Priors* or Guardians<sup>1</sup> of the Friars Minor. Up to that time there had properly speaking been no noviciates among them. Men entered the Order when they thought themselves called by an inspiration from above, and they left it, if their reason or inconstancy pointed out a better way of life to them. The Brief put an end to this state of things: "In almost all the religious families," said the Sovereign Pontiff, "it has been wisely established that those who desire to practise regular observances should make a trial of these observances during a determined space of time, and that they themselves should be on trial also. The intention of this is to prevent future regrets by giving no opportunity for inconsiderate acts. Wherefore, we command you, by these presents, henceforth to admit no brother to profession in your Order before he shall have made a year's probation, and for the same reason we will that when once this profession has been made, no brother shall be able to leave the Order, and if anyone does leave it we forbid everyone to keep him with them." We see how the spirit of organisation

<sup>1</sup> Francis would not have approved of the name of *Prior* being used as synonymous with Guardian. The Roman Curia was not yet familiar with his idea.

penetrated the work of Francis in every direction. What had been no inconvenience in a small community in which the spirit of the Founder could meet and vivify each individual, would finally have brought instability into the Order when it increased and required the aid of precise rules. Cardinal Ugolino saw this, and it is easy to recognise his hand in all these changes.

Lastly, and this was the most unexpected and dramatic event, Francis gave in his resignation as Minister General at one of the meetings of the Chapter. He appears to have done it suddenly. "From this moment," he said to the brethren, "I am dead for you; but here is our brother Peter Catani; he it is whom both you and I will henceforth obey." And without another word he prostrated himself at the feet of Peter Catani, and promised him obedience and respect. The astonishment was extreme. All the brethren had tears in their eyes. "What!" they said, "could it be true that they were to lose such a father and to become orphans!" Then Francis stood up. Seeing the general emotion he joined his hands and raised his eyes to heaven. "Oh, most sweet Lord," he said, "I recommend to Thee this family that Thou hast entrusted to me this day. My infirmities, Thou knowest, make it impossible for me longer to take care of it. I put it into the hands of ministers. If it come to pass that by their negligence, their scandals, or their too great severity, one of the brethren perish, they will give account to Thee at the day of judgment."

No entreaties or arguments could make Francis retract this determination. He would only consent to preserve the title and rights of Minister General. His successors, as long as he lived, were to have, and in fact did have merely the title of Vicar General. Thanks to this arrangement, the act had no very serious external effects. Peter Catani did by his own authority what he had for some years done as a delegate, and that was nearly all the difference. The moral consequences were more im-

portant. The holy Founder could now with greater security of conscience consecrate his remaining strength to the apostolate. Since the Order had spread over the whole world, his government entailed constant intervention. The superior had daily to answer questions of a delicate nature. He must, besides, keep in close relation with the brethren, so as to know which of them were fitted for various situations. These cases required that he should live almost constantly at the centre of the work. Now, up to this time, Francis had been an admirable inspirer stirring up souls, more than an administrator in the somewhat narrow sense that we attach to the word. He thought, and it does not seem that those in whom he had confidence blamed him for it, that he ought to reserve himself for what he looked upon as his peculiar vocation, the one he had received from God and that God had blessed him in.

Another effect of his resignation was to satisfy the longing after humility and obedience which was so deeply impressed in his soul. He was not content, says his principal historian, with resigning his office of Minister General, he demanded a guardian besides, one whom he undertook to consider as his superior in all his acts. "For the love of God," he said to Peter Catani, after having promised obedience to him, "point out one of my companions to take your place with me, whom I may obey like yourself. I know all the riches of obedience. As soon as a man has accepted its yoke, there is not one moment in his life that is without merit." They acceded to his request, and up to the time of his death he had a superior always with him to direct his smallest actions. The first use Francis made of his recovered liberty was to write a new Rule. According to the Three Companions, he had already composed and tried several, besides the one he had originally presented to Pope Innocent III. But none of these experiments, which, moreover, did not satisfy himself, have come down to us. On the other hand, we possess the one that he wrote on this occasion, and though it was not definite, it is so true an



expression of his sentiments at this period, that we cannot do less than give an idea of its general character. The holy Founder seems to have been in a state of perfect serenity when he drew it up. It is as much the outpouring of the heart of a father in the midst of his children, as the injunctions of a legislator framing a law that he desires to be observed. Imperative formulas are not absent, but a tone of exhortation, and even of entreaty, is what chiefly prevails in it. There is something very touching in these entreaties: "I beg any brother who may be sick," he says in the tenth chapter, "to give thanks to the Creator. May his desire be, to become as the Lord wishes, whether in health or in sickness; because, as it is written in the Apocalypse, 'such as I love, I rebuke and chastise.' God makes use of scourges and infirmities for the growth of those whom He has predestined to eternal life. If the sick man is troubled and irritated against God or against his brethren, or if by an inordinate desire to save a body which must soon die, and which is the enemy of the spirit, he anxiously calls for the help of physic, he shows that evil is indeed within him, he is carnal, he does not seem to be any longer one of our brethren, because he loves his body more than his soul."

In the 17th chapter he tries to guard the brethren against vainglory: "I pray, in that charity which is God Himself, all my brethren, preachers, orators, workmen, to strive to be humble in all things, not to glorify themselves or to be exalted within, for the good words, good deeds, and, in general, for any good that God may say or do in them, or by them, according to what the Lord said: rejoice not in this that spirits are subject unto you. We know by certain knowledge that we have nothing of our own but our faults and sins. Therefore, what ought to rejoice us are temptations, sufferings of soul and body, the tribulations of all kinds that we endure in this world for the sake of eternal life. I tell you all, my brethren, be well on your guard against pride and vainglory."

The 22nd chapter, entitled, "Exhortation to the brethren,"

is the one which has most of the character of oratory. There is nothing in it to show that it is part of a monastic rule. It is an abridgment of one or more homilies which may have been preached with effect in a general Chapter. Francis comments on the parable of the sower, and begs his brethren to be, by the grace of God, neither the wayside hardened by the footsteps of passers by, nor the stony ground where everything dries up at once, nor the field choked with thorns. He repeats his favourite form of adjuration as a peroration: "In that holy charity which is God, I conjure all my brethren, ministers, and others, to cast aside all obstacles, and to place in the second rank all the cares and solitudes of life, that they may, before all things, serve, honour, and love our Lord with an upright heart and pure intention, for that is what God seeks and expects from us. Let us make for Him an abode and a sanctuary within our hearts: He is the Almighty Lord God, and He has said, Watch and pray always."

After these effusions, another distinguishing feature of this Rule is that there are signs in it of softening and leniency, extended even to poverty itself. That austere virtue is certainly always advocated. "Let no brother," says the holy legislator, "in whatever place he may be, or whither-soever he may go, carry, receive, or cause to be received, money or silver, either for clothes, or for books, or as salary for work, or, in short, for any reason whatever, because we are forbidden to think that there is more utility in money or in silver, than in stones and dust." But to this principle so decisively laid down, Francis adds a modification that he had not admitted originally, and that he did not maintain in the future: "A little money may, however, be received for the sick brethren, if there is manifest need for it."

The breach was made, though it was a very narrow one. It was not long before they sought to widen it, and it proves how insidious the temptation was, when we find it was Peter Catani whom Francis had just appointed Vicar, who, with the best intentions in the world, made the proposal. He said to

Francis one day : " My dear brother, a daily increasing number of our religious come here to the centre of the Order. The alms of the faithful hardly suffice to enable us to receive them. Do you not think it would be well to make, from the possessions of the novices, a sort of reserve, from whence we could draw whenever it was necessary ? " At this proposal, which wounded Francis to the quick, and was quite unexpected by him, he regained his former vigour. " My well beloved brother," he said, " God forbid that for any one in the world we should show pity which would make us unfaithful to our Rule. " " But then what am I to do ? " replied Peter. " My brother, strip the altar of the Blessed Virgin, take from it its empty ornaments, if you have no other way of providing for our wants. I assure you that a bare altar will be more agreeable to Mary if we observe the Gospel, than one enriched with ornaments, if we despise her Divine Son. Besides, I think God will send us some generous rich man who will give us back what we have had to sacrifice for a time. "

After writing his Rule, Francis left it to be tried, without again seeking for it the approbation of the Holy See, and recommenced his apostolic journeys. He started in the direction of the Marches of Ancona, in company with Brother Paul, whom he had just named minister of the province. We know that he preached at Ancona, but the historians have told us nothing of the results of that preaching. From Ancona he went to Osimo. He was on the road leading to that town when he saw in a meadow a flock of goats, and in the midst of them one sheep peacefully browsing. Seeing it the only one of its kind amongst the others Francis stopped : " Do you see that little sheep," he said to his companion, " how gently it goes about amongst all that flock of goats ? In truth I tell you that thus our Lord Jesus Christ walked in the midst of the Pharisees and High Priests. For love of this Divine Saviour, my son, let us have pity on this poor little creature and buy it, that we may take it out of this insolent company. " Brother Paul

only half understood the pitiful compassion of Francis, but he entered into his idea, though they had nothing to give but the poor tunics they had on. They were wondering what they could possibly offer to the shepherd, when Providence came to their aid. A merchant passing by noticed their perplexity, and inquired in a friendly way what was the matter. The brothers told him of the project that was in their minds, and he generously offered them the money they needed. Francis praised God who had provided for the desires of His poor servants. The little sheep was given to him. It walked behind him as they entered the town and accompanied them to the palace of the bishop, to whom they made it a duty to present themselves. He received them kindly and showed some deference to the servant of God, but he seemed puzzled by the little sheep which Francis took about with him, and for which he seemed to have much affection. The Saint, divining his thoughts, related to him how he had seen in it a loving image of the Divine Saviour. This explanation greatly edified the prelate; he raised his hands to heaven, giving thanks for the pure-mindedness of this true friend of Jesus Christ. Francis did not carry this pious symbolism too far. He knew that he could not always be followed by the humble, gentle creature, and the next day, on going out of the town, he considered what would be best to do with it. By the advice of his companion he decided to take it to San Severino, to the monastery of the Poor Ladies, where some years before he had admitted Brother Pacificus into the Order. The venerable daughters of S. Clara willingly received the gift. For many years they lavished the greatest care upon the little animal, and in 1224 they wove from its wool a garment for their venerated father. The present arrived at S. Mary of the Portiuncula just as Francis was holding the last Chapter that he presided over before his death. The unexpected attention filled him with innocent joy. He kissed the tunic several times with great respect, and invited all who were present to join in his pleasure.



Pentecost in the year 1221 fell on the 30th May. The Chapter assembled as usual at Our Lady of the Portiuncula. It was the last that preserved the original character of a plenary assembly. Francis decreed that instead of being composed of all the brethren, in future Chapters only the provincial ministers should assemble. The provincials from beyond the mountains and across the sea should only be required to attend once in three years. On the other hand, each provincial must hold a Chapter in his province, not at Pentecost or Michaelmas, as had been done hitherto, but once only at Michaelmas. The Franciscan family, like all families that increase, had reached the time when dispersion became a necessity to them. The pleasant cordial reunions of early years could no longer be thought of; the brethren must think themselves fortunate if, by means of their superiors, they could maintain a spirit of unity in this great body. No doubt Francis sighed over the necessity of making this decree, and that more than one brother wept when he heard it promulgated, for we have seen how dear these assemblies were to both father and children; but all were obliged to acknowledge that they must give up the advantages they had obtained from this system.

The most important fact of this Chapter was the presence of him whom we venerate under the name of S. Antony of Padua. And yet he was the one who was least remarked. He had not been announced; no one knew him. God, by a combination of circumstances, had brought him from Portugal to the centre of the Order, in which he was soon to become a shining light, and one of its greatest honours. We left him sailing to Africa as to the predestined land of his labours and sacrifice. He landed there without opposition, but only to be attacked at once by a violent fever, which reduced him to suffering and weakness during the whole winter, so that by the time spring had come he felt himself completely unfit for any work. He set sail again, intending to return for a short time only to

his native land to seek the restoration of his strength. But scarcely had the vessel started when a violent wind threw it out of its course and drove it eastward to the coast of Sicily, near Taormina, the ancient episcopal town of the province of Messina. The traditions of the country hold that he began to preach there, and with such effect as to bring about several vocations. Then, learning that a general Chapter was about to be opened at S. Mary of the Portiuncula, he was inspired to go to it, although the journey was a trying one for his still delicate health. We can imagine the thoughts that attracted him thither. He would see the assembled Order! He would hear Francis! He would pray in S. Mary's!

In fact, he did assist at the Chapter, and followed all its exercises, but, strange to say, he was lost amongst the crowd, and no one paid attention to him, not even Francis, who was generally so quick in discovering merit. At the close of the assembly, when the obediences were distributed, no post was assigned to him. Everybody looking upon him as a useless man, says his historian, he remained on the hands of the Minister General. And yet his ideas were entirely changed. Africa, he could not explain why, no longer attracted him, he now only aspired to live in Italy. Certainly he might have gone to Francis, but to do so he must have broken through his habitual reserve; he found it simpler to accept the offer of the minister of Romagna, who was looking for a priest to say mass in one of the hermitages of his province, and proposed to take him there. This hermitage was near Forli in the Emilia, and was called S. Paul, after the name of the first hermit. Antony, lately so eager for action, now plunged into this solitude. He became enamoured of retreat and silence. One of the brethren who lived there had constructed a cell in a grotto that was most favourably adapted as a place for meditation. When Antony saw it he begged the brother to give it up to him, which he did, and the Saint immediately made it his cell, "his tower of David," his historians say, that is, his

favourite place of retreat for prayer. There he remained nearly the whole day, scarcely ever appearing amongst the brethren except to take his rapid meals. He even spent part of the night there, for his prayers began before dawn, as soon as he had chanted matins with the community. How his inner life and knowledge increased in these prolonged communions with God we shall have occasion to speak of later.

Meanwhile we must solve a difficulty that has doubtless presented itself to the reader's mind. There was this hermitage of S. Paul ; we have seen another at La Vernia. Then Francis had not so completely adopted the active life as to leave no place for the contemplative. There can be no question about this. From the beginning there were a number of hermitages in the Order. They were little convents, generally situated on mountains, or in woods, composed of an oratory and some cells. Sometimes they became the permanent dwelling of brothers who cared only for prayer. At other times, and this was most usual, they served temporarily as a house of retreat for those brothers who, after long preachings, felt the need of refreshing themselves in solitude before undertaking fresh warfare. Nor would Francis willingly have dispensed with this means of renovation in his own case. What he loved to have himself he recommended often to his brethren as a most salutary practice. He even composed a special rule for the use of these voluntary hermits. These are its principal dispositions :—The brethren went in fours to these houses of meditation. On their arrival, two of them undertook the office of mothers, and the two others the part of children. The mothers were the Marthas of the hermitage ; they watched over the children, provided for their nourishment by begging for them, and defended them against interruptions. The children were to imitate Mary, sitting tranquil and attentive at the feet of Jesus. They had a cell apart, they recited the canonical hours at the times prescribed by the Church, and gave the rest of the day to meditation on eternal truths. After a certain time had elapsed, the

parts were reversed, the mothers became children, and the children mothers.<sup>1</sup> Who does not recognise the spirit of Francis, at once serious and playful, in this mixture of activity and repose, of contemplation and charity.

Another noticeable fact is the names of S. Antony and S. Paul given to the two hermitages successively occupied by Brother Antony. It shows that Francis and his first disciples associated that side of their Order with the Fathers of the Desert. They had, doubtless, read those admirable Lives in which, as it has been well said, "everything is to be found, variety, the pathetic, the sublime, and the simplicity of a race of men artless as children and strong as giants."<sup>2</sup> They felt themselves able to understand these models, and while often following a different road themselves, they liked to put under their patronage the rare days that they could spend in living their life. In the museum at Perugia there is an excellent picture composed of three figures. In the centre is S. Antony, bent with years and leaning on his staff, which terminates in the form of a cross and is surmounted by a little bell. To right and left are S. Francis and S. Antony of Padua; they accompany the old man, and are looking on him with respect mixed with tenderness, in the attitude of disciples receiving counsel. Nothing could be closer to the truth. The artist had indeed an intuition of the soul of S. Francis, when he composed this picture.

<sup>1</sup> The authentic text of this rule was published by Papini, "*Storia di San Francesco*," vol. ii. p. 148, under this title, *Regula pro fratribus volentibus stare in heremis.*

<sup>2</sup> Montalembert, "*Moines d'Occident*," tom. i. p. 57.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE THIRD ORDER, 1221.

IT seems probable that Francis now began to feel what he certainly felt in his latter years, that the government of a multitude is difficult. There are few leaders who have not, sooner or later, repeated the words of the prophet: "Thou hast increased my people, thou hast not increased my joy."<sup>1</sup> It may have been that in the extraordinary development of his Order he saw an unexpected form of those riches he had so absolutely renounced. His biographers seem to infer it when they tell us that he was sometimes heard exclaiming, "There are too many Minors. Oh! when will the time come when men, meeting our friars only at long intervals, shall complain that the Minors are so few in number?"

Whatever the cause may have been, it is certain that for several years Francis tried to discourage rather than favour men's eagerness to enter the First Order. He saw that the high ideal he required of the brethren could not be followed by every one. One day, as he was preaching in the little village of Cannara, two leagues from Assisi, his hearers were so carried away by his words, that all—men and women, young and old—threw themselves at his feet and besought him with tears to clothe them in the habit of the Minors. "Do nothing of the kind," he said; "you are not able, nor ought you to do it. But I will think of you, I will seek, and, with God's blessing, I shall find, a means of sanctification more within your compass." This promise he renewed on other occasions. "What must we do?" the people asked him. "We cannot

<sup>1</sup> Salimbene quoted these words, turning them against the administration of Brother Elias: "Ah! domine Helya, multiplicasti gentem, non magnificasti lætitiā." "*Chronica*," p. 404.

forsake our wives," said the husbands ; " we cannot leave our husbands," said the wives. " How shall we save ourselves ? " " Remain as you are," answered Francis. " I will think of you and do something for you." After a little while, his inventive mind found the right thing. He would create a new and very vast association of men and women, who joining together and being in connection with the First Order, without leaving the world would enjoy some of the strength and peace of the religious life. His plan had been long ripening, and he had probably arranged all its details, when in 1221 he came to preach in Tuscany. At Poggibonsi, near Siena, he found the man who seemed to him made to be the type of the family he intended to organise. This was an inhabitant of Caggiano, named Lucchese. His history is edifying. He had, when very young, married the woman of his heart, whose name was Bonadonna. He had an agreeable countenance, good manners, and an amiable, modest disposition. He was ambitious. Though only a tradesman, he thought it would be a fine thing to vie with the nobles. It became a passion with him. He knew that the only way of succeeding was to become rich and dazzle the country by his magnificence, attracting attention to himself. With this end in view he began to speculate in grain. He bought up as much as he could, and when he had created a sort of artificial famine, he resold at a high price what he had stored up. In this way his fortune soon increased, and his desire for wealth was about to be realised, when a change took place in him. One day when he was alone, he began to think of the sovereignty of God, the wisdom and goodness that He has displayed in creation, and that He still continues to manifest in the government of the world, and the great longsuffering with which He bears with and receives sinners. These noble thoughts elevated him beyond his ordinary self. He saw that he was not doing well in pursuing riches that must perish. After consultation with his wife, he sold the greater part of his goods and distributed the price to the poor. He only kept a house

and a garden of four acres that he intended to cultivate with his own hands. It was less than mediocrity after a life of opulence. He carried out the sacrifice with such generosity that soon he reserved nothing for himself. The humble house became *the poor man's inn* for the whole district. They came in troops, and Lucchese wished that each should have something given him according to his needs. One day, when all the bread that was in the bin had been distributed, his wife who, though she had taken to a charitable life, yet thought there should be some moderation in it, was somewhat out of humour. More poor people coming up, Lucchese told her to give them also a piece of bread. "O brainless head, weakened by fasting," she answered, "and where am I to find bread to give them?" "In the bin, my Bonadonna," replied Lucchese. "Be good in deed as you are in name. Have confidence in Him who fed five thousand men with five loaves and two small fishes." She opened the bin, though without feeling the confidence required of her. O marvel! It was full of loaves up to the brim. Delighted and overcome, Bonadonna ran to her husband, weeping and laughing, and from that day she never needed to be constrained to works of charity.

This pious household was well prepared with all virtues when the patriarch of the poor came to Poggibonsi. Lucchese took care not to miss this favourable occasion of meeting a man whose holiness was so renowned. He went at once to him, and Francis received him kindly. Won by his reception, he opened his heart to the Saint and asked him how he and his wife could attain to perfection. We have said that Lucchese had a prepossessing exterior. Francis, perceiving how detached he was from the world, how anxious to serve our Lord, and how tender he was towards the poor, felt sure that God had sent him to him. "For some time," he replied, "I have been thinking of founding a Third Order in which married people will have more opportunity of serving God faithfully. You can be the first to enrol yourself." Then he explained

to him the form he intended to give to this Order. Lucchese said he should consider it a great grace to be called to belong to it, and Bonadonna, when she heard about it, declared that she would join her husband. Encouraged by this promising beginning, Francis publicly announced his design, not only at Poggibonsi, but throughout the Val d'Elsa. A number of men and women, amongst whom are mentioned one Bruno, and another named Martolese, as being especially fervent, came immediately to offer themselves to him. Francis assembled them together several times at Poggibonsi, in a little chapel that he had received the year before from the liberality of the Sienese, and when he thought them sufficiently prepared, in the presence of spectators who were moved to tears of emotion at the sight, he clothed them in a simple, modest habit of ash grey, very like the one worn by the brethren of the First Order. Thus was formed the first group, or rather, to give it the name by which Francis called it, the first fraternity of the Third Order of Penance.

Benedict XIII. in 1725 accurately defined the character of the Third Order from its very beginning. "We enact and declare," he says, "that the Third Order has always been, and is, holy, meritorious, and in conformity with Christian perfection, and moreover that it is truly, in the full force of the term, an Order, containing in its unity seculars spread throughout the world, since it has its rule approved by the Holy See, its noviciate, its profession, and a habit of a particular form and colour." Then it was an Order properly so called, an Order composed of people living in the world, that is to say, not taking religious vows, that Francis had created. An idea of that kind had never before been heard of in the Church. A certain number of monasteries had, it is true, given here and there letters of affiliation to persons outside their Order, by which letters, those who were affiliated participated in their prayers, good works, and merits. It was a moral union, and a sort of extension of the religious family. But there was a wide difference between that and an Order having a distinct existence of its own and embrac-



ing the faithful of the whole world. The honour of having created this novelty is entirely due to the genius of S. Francis. The success of the new institution speedily surpassed all expectations. It seemed as if men's minds and hearts must have been waiting for it, so ardently did the multitude flock into the Order. The proofs of this enthusiasm are undeniable. In June 1221 Francis assembled the first Tertiaries. At the end of the same year, not only do we find fraternities in Tuscany, Umbria, and the Marches of Ancona, but what is more extraordinary, these fraternities were even then numerous in themselves, and had a sufficiently developed life to permit of their putting themselves in opposition to the feudal lords. The first intervention of the Papacy in their favour, a bull of Honorius, addressed to the Bishop of Rimini, is dated December 16th. Six years later, the struggle of the Third Order with feudalism had become general. Starting from one diocese, it had invaded all the others. On the 25th June 1227 Gregory IX., who had succeeded Honorius, fulminates a new bull in their defence. This time he does not address himself to one bishop in particular, but to all the archbishops and bishops in Italy. One might have imagined that the Tertiaries, scattered over a wide country, were few and unnoticed in the midst of a population ignorant of their very existence. A most important official document shows the contrary to have been the case; the multitude, men, women, young people, were Tertiaries, those who were not were the exceptions. This is what the bishops of Italy, collectively, wrote to the Emperor Frederick II.: "The Friars Minor, and the Preaching Friars, have risen up against us. They have publicly reprov'd our life and conversation. They have destroyed our rights, and brought us to nothing. . . . And now, as the finishing stroke against our power, and to deprive us of the devotion of the people, they have created two new confraternities which universally include men and women. Every one runs in to them. Hardly a person can be found who is not inscribed in one

or other of them.”<sup>1</sup> These last words are remarkable: in the bishops’ opinion everybody was a Tertiary.

There is something of the miraculous in this diffusion. The causes of it must evidently lie in the advantages which the Third Order offered to those who came into it. In fact, we perceive two different kinds of benefits, both very important, that must have greatly recommended the institution.

The first touches all that is deepest in the human soul. The Third Order presented itself as an approved Order, and consequently as a school of piety. Perhaps the Rule written by Francis might not in itself have sufficed to create a religious revival, but it offered an excellent framework for one that was already partly accomplished. The Tertiaries were obliged: 1st, to put an end to all hatred, and to restore all ill-acquired gain; 2nd, to profess the Catholic religion, and to practise the commandments of God and of the Church; 3rd, to go to confession, and communicate three times in the year; 4th, to wear a plain dress, and abstain from worldly assemblies; 5th, and this was the most difficult, to recite the Office, if possible, every day, and to fast, unless prevented, in Advent and Lent. This was nearly all that related to the spiritual life of the soul. These rules seem to us now very simple, but we must remember that an Order intended for the whole world was bound to impose only such rules as would be possible for every one. Besides, in these matters, the letter is of little consequence, it is the spirit which gives life, and in this case the spirit was admirable. It was the spirit of the Lord that had descended on Francis as a vase of election, and was poured out from him and from his brethren to the ends of the world. It was this spirit which collected

<sup>1</sup> All the historians who mention this letter, including M. Siméon Luce in “*Jeanne d’Arc à Domremi*,” attribute it to the chancellor of the Emperor Frederic II., Pierre de la Vigne. This is a mistake. The letter certainly is to be found amongst the collection of letters of the chancellor, but its title, and still more its contents, indicate that it was written by the Italian Episcopate. The bishops go so far as to say that so great is the impulse to join the Mendicants, that there will soon be nothing left for them but to let out their cathedrals for shops.

the Tertiaries together and then carried them on with a strong impulse to heights to which individuals, left to themselves, would never have attained. A wave of blessing seemed to pass over the world. Many a chamber became a cell, many a house a Thebaid. There were the monthly meetings, and the pleasant novelty of being dressed alike and living together as brothers. They knew and helped and loved each other. Association is a deep-seated necessity in the heart of man. The Tertiaries felt that they were associated, and associated for the conquest of all that is greatest in heaven and earth. The name of the Founder, too, was a great attraction. It does not appear that Francis directly created any fraternity of the Third Order after that of Poggibonsi, but everywhere he was the soul of the movement. Celano says that the people saw nothing but him, they did not know how to praise him enough. They proclaimed him a Saint, and more than that, the Saint given by God for that special time, and now that by the Third Order, the honour of belonging to his family was put within reach of all, everybody was ambitious of becoming a member of it. After his death, which took place soon afterwards, the enthusiasm increased instead of diminishing. Since he was immediately canonised by public opinion, and two years afterwards by the Holy See, all good Christians were eager to place themselves under his patronage.

There was another cause of attraction towards him. The Church says that the Saints speak from their sepulchres. *Defunctus adhuc loquitur*. Francis, whose words had been the joy of that time, had the privilege of speaking distinctly after his death. "One day," writes the Tertiary, S. Angela, "S. Francis appeared to me in glory. He saluted me with his usual salutation: 'The peace of the Most High be with thee.' The voice of S. Francis is always very pious, humble, gracious, and tender." Who can say how many people, after the blessed Angela, have thought they heard that voice bringing them, if not a revelation, at least a salutation and consolation? "You

praise me," wrote the Cardinal Trejo to the Annalist of the Minors in 1623, "because I have made profession of the Rule of the Third Order of S. Francis, after having been invested with the Cardinal's purple. Could I do less than devote myself to his Order, when I acknowledge that to him I owe all that I have and all that I am?" The same faith is shown in our own day. I have often conversed with members of the Third Order who were warmly attached to the Saint. This attachment almost always came, less from a great knowledge of his mind and virtues than from a sort of personal impression received directly from above. Men's hearts still hear the voice of S. Francis.

The great number of Saints produced by the Third Order is a proof of its being a school of perfection. In the thirteenth century alone fourteen Tertiaries were either canonised or beatified by the Church. The first Orders might have been jealous had not these virtues been due in great measure to their example and work.

Lucchese, the first Tertiary, nobly opened the road. His charity that had been so active before, increased after he had put on the habit of S. Francis. He was no longer satisfied with receiving the poor at his house when they came to him. He went himself to great distances to seek them and deliver them from their misery. He was sometimes seen returning with three of these poor creatures, carrying the weakest on his back, and leading the two others in either hand. When once they were within his house he surrounded them with such care, showed them such kindness, and instructed them so well, that he often succeeded not only in reconciling them to their situation, but even in making them pass from forced to voluntary poverty. It was the triumph of Christian charity, and this charity in Lucchese was of the kind that gives itself entirely to all. There were then, as there are now, not far from Siena, wide marshy tracts called the Maremma, which were, especially in summer, a hotbed of malaria and fever. Lucchese thought of going to help the scattered and



forsaken inhabitants of this unhealthy region and giving them some medical assistance. He bought an ass and loaded it with suitable drugs, and then started on his new work. He was soon known and loved. He seemed so good and kind and devoted to those unfortunate people that his very presence helped to cure them at least as much as his physic did.

This active worker was also a very interior man. He understood that prayer is placed between God and man as a means of communion, that it appeases the anger of the Almighty, delivers us from the temporal and eternal punishments we have deserved, and finally leads us into the blessed life destined for us. He knew that through it, even in this world, the hidden, invisible God becomes present to us, and we are enabled to speak with Him as with a friend. Consequently he prayed, and prayed frequently. His biographer tells us that in this point he could compare with S. Francis. Within and without, he says, at work and at rest, on the road and in the house, his spirit never ceased praying.

His death was grand and serene as that of a patriarch. He and his wife had both fallen ill at the same time. Suddenly she became worse, and they came to tell him of it. He immediately went to her to advise her to receive the sacraments, and had strength enough to assist devoutly at the pious ceremony. Then he felt that he was sinking, and he said to his dying wife : "O my beloved and devoted companion, we have served God together in all affection, and we shall be permitted to go together to the unspeakable joys. Wait for me. I am now going to receive the sacraments thou hast just had, and I shall go to heaven with thee." Then he made the sign of the cross over her, and with difficulty regained his bed. He asked them to fetch his confessor, Father Hildebrand of the Order of Minors, with whom he was united in close friendship. When the friar came, finding him pale and weak, he said : "My very dear Brother Lucchese, be strong and prepare

thy soul to appear before thy Saviour, for, believe me, the moment is near at hand when thou shalt see thy salvation and crown of glory." At these words Lucchese raised his head a little. "My good Father Hildebrand," he said, smiling, "if I had waited till now to prepare my soul, I should still have confidence in God's mercy; but, to tell the truth, I should leave the world with less security on account of the terrors of the passage." And raising his arms towards heaven he continued: "Thanks to the Most Holy Trinity, to the Blessed Mary, ever a Virgin, and to my blessed Father Francis, I feel myself free and ready, and I believe that, not through my merits, but through those of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, I shall escape the snares of the devil." He received the Sacraments of Extreme Unction and of the Holy Eucharist with the most lively sentiments of faith, then, hearing that his wife was in her agony, he made a last effort to drag himself to her, and remained beside her, tenderly holding her hands until her saintly soul had passed into heaven. The assistants carried him back to his bed, and he had hardly been laid upon it when his eyes became fixed. He made the sign of the cross, with his heart and lips invoked the names of Jesus, Mary, and Francis, and gently gave up his spirit on the 27th April 1260, in presence of a number of religious, clerics, and devout friends. The Church has placed him in the number of the beatified.

The lives of other Tertiary Saints are even more interesting. Unfortunately we have not space to relate them, even in an abridged form. We will content ourselves with mentioning a few of the names sweet to the Church "as a mixture of perfumes." In the century of which we are treating we find in Germany, S. Elisabeth of Hungary, the amiable and *beloved Saint*, so well known, especially in France, thanks to a celebrated life of her; in Spain, S. Ferdinand of Castile, who united all the glories of a Christian with all the virtues of a Saint, and the tenderest love of his people with the most ardent love to God; in France, S.

Ivo of Brittany, the lawyer who was regarded as a prodigy in the Middle Ages, because he had never prevaricated ; and higher still, S. Louis, so sincere, strong, and tender, and notwithstanding the difference of their positions, so truly like S. Francis, and whom the entire Third Order has adopted as patron whose feast they celebrate to this day with the greatest solemnity.<sup>1</sup> Italy offers quite a company of female Saints : S. Rose of Viterbo, an heroic child of whom we shall speak again in this same chapter ; the blessed Umiliana Cerchi, at twenty years of age a widow of the kind S. Paul approved of, that is to say, desolate and given to good works ; S. Margaret of Cortona, as ardent in her repentance as she had been in her sins, who wept for her faults so much and loved God so fervently that she has been called, without profanation, the Seraphic Magdalene ; and finally, the blessed Angela of Foligno, who, without any preparation, thinks and sometimes expresses herself as Dante would have done, and of whom it may be said, as of the ancient prophets, that the Spirit of God fell suddenly upon her, so quickly she passed from the agitation of a worldly life to the contemplation of the mysteries of God.

We doubt whether the sole desire of leading a higher life would have been sufficiently powerful to attract a whole country into new paths. It may have been so in the case of women, who are always easily led towards God when their good side is aroused, but with men, who are more absorbed in the things and interests of the world, it is less probable. But the holy Founder knew that these interests are intimately connected with the moral life, and he did not neglect them. The Third Order may be said to be one of the greatest efforts ever attempted for introducing more justice amongst men. This point of view requires some explanation.

In the Rule there are three articles expressed as follows :—  
“ Chap. vii. The brethren must carry no offensive weapons,

<sup>1</sup> It has been disputed whether S. Ivo and S. Louis were Tertiaries. The Franciscan tradition is constant.

except in defence of the Church and the faith of Jesus Christ, or in defence of their country, or with the permission of the superiors. Chap. xii. The brethren must abstain from solemn oaths, unless they are constrained by necessity and keep within the limit of the cases excepted by the Holy See. Chap. xiii. Each brother will give a farthing of current money to the treasurer, who will collect this money and distribute it suitably, according to the advice of the ministers, to the brethren and sisters who are destitute." In the present day these articles, except the last, are without object or application. Probably Tertiaries, who read them, have some difficulty in understanding their meaning. In the Middle Ages they were a stroke of genius. They contained the germ of a beneficent revolution of a kind that has not often been brought about in the history of the world.

They changed the then existing social order, in favour of the weak and humble. As was to be expected, they could not be put into practice without difficulty. Those for whose advantage they were made, seized upon them as upon a weapon of unexpected utility and power, while those whom they tended to weaken resisted them with violent opposition. The struggle broke out at Faenza, less than three months after the foundation of the Third Order. The inhabitants of Faenza were passionate Guelphs. In 1240 they sustained a memorable siege against the emperor in person, which lasted more than seven months. In 1221 they soon saw the advantages they could gain from the new institution. They enrolled themselves in it in great numbers, and, setting up the Rule against the feudatories, who, probably, were mostly Ghibelines, they declared that they were forbidden to follow them to war. "We are religious," they said; "we will no longer bind ourselves to your fortunes by an oath." So new and singular a declaration must have astonished and even frightened the nobles. If this state of things was allowed to spread, all their power would be menaced, therefore they employed every means they knew of to stifle it in the bud. The Tertiaries were not without resources. An



article in the Rule seems to have foreseen what occurred : " If it happens that the brethren are troubled in their rights and privileges by unjust vexations from the authorities and nobles, the ministers of the place will appeal to the Bishop and other ordinaries of the locality." In conformity with this indication, the ministers of Faenza appealed to the Bishop of Rimini. That prelate was greatly disturbed at the importance of the interests that were at stake ; he did not venture to take up any course of action on his own responsibility, and he referred the question to the Court of Rome. The opinion of Honorius was formed in his conversations with Cardinal Ugolino, and he was not long in giving his answer. On the 16th December he wrote, that the lords and authorities must be the enemies of all virtue if they constrained to military service men who, having renounced all glory in this world, aspired to nothing but to lead a Christian life, and to practise works of penance. He ordered the Bishop to grant the request of those who had addressed him, and to employ all the power of the Holy See, even if need were by an excommunication, to destroy the pretensions of their adversaries.

We can imagine the effect of such intervention. When it was known that to escape military service it was sufficient to be enrolled amongst the Tertiaries, it was as good as done. The people on all sides were worn out with the constant wars that were the scourge of those days, and the weight of which fell almost entirely upon them, and they hurried into an institution that promised them a more tranquil life. Fraternities were formed from north to south of the Peninsula. The nobles on their side redoubled their efforts to defend their situation. They had always looked upon it as their right to attach to themselves by oath, and to lead into their wars, those who were sheltered at the foot of their castles or who lived in their domains. Against this right the Tertiaries asserted their religious quality. But it was difficult to recognise as true religious, men who were married and lived in their own houses, enjoying their possessions, and who were only distinguished

from the rest of their fellow-citizens by graver manners and a more austere style of dress. If the privileges of the religious could be obtained on such easy conditions, everybody would enter religion, and feudal power would be reduced to nothing. There would be a new order of things.

The question was at this stage, when Cardinal Ugolino, the friend of Francis, was placed on the chair of S. Peter. He threw in the weight of his authority with singular decision. His election took place on the 18th March 1227. As early as June 25th he addressed a bull to all the Bishops of Italy. Nothing could have been stronger than were its terms towards the feudal system. He compares the feudatories to the worst oppressors, to the Pharaohs of Egypt oppressing the people of Israel with an intolerable yoke. He reproaches them with persecuting those whom they ought to honour as true friends of the Lord. He declares that the Tertiaries are truly men of God, and that it is the duty of the Holy See to defend them in the accomplishment of their religious purposes. Consequently he enjoins on the Bishops to employ ecclesiastical censures to assure to them the privileges due to those who belong to the Church. They must not be liable either to oath or to military service. They cannot be forced to accept or to exercise public functions. All that can be demanded of them is, that they should acquit themselves of the charges to which they are constrained by reason of their possessions.

No more military service from the multitude, no more oaths of fealty. Feudalism felt itself struck in its most vital part. Nothing remained to it except the dues and tolls, and these were mostly redeemable; and, in fact, the Tertiaries had begun to redeem them. They possessed considerable sums of money. The little coin that each brother had to give at the meeting swelled into a large treasure when everyone became a Tertiary. The ministers did not hesitate to draw upon this treasury for the enfranchisement of those who were still in the hand of the feudal lords. The latter were lost if they did not quickly find some method of re-establish-

ing their privileges. They planned a perfect network of obligations in which they hoped to entangle those who were escaping them. First : In place of a direct oath, they annexed to all acts passed within their jurisdiction an oath in which their power was formally, though indirectly, recognised. Second : They laid a tax upon Tertiaries who refused military service. They no doubt relied upon the well-known fact that they themselves were bound to pay to their suzerain a fixed sum for each man wanting in their contingent.<sup>1</sup> Third : They refused the money brought by the Tertiaries for the redemption of the tolls, pretending that the money was not theirs, but was furnished by a society. Fourth : They held the Tertiaries responsible for the obligations, debts, and even the crimes of all the members of the corporation.

Dismayed at these measures, which would have placed them lower than they were before, the Tertiaries once more had recourse to their protector. The Pontiff did not disappoint their hopes. His answer this time was addressed, not to the Bishops, but to all the brethren of the Order of Penance in Italy. He gave them satisfaction on all points. He said that only the sons of darkness could have been able to elude to this extent the advantages conceded by the bulls of his predecessors and by his own. He recognised that the situation they wished to create was worse than the one from which they had been extricated. He authorised them to refuse any oath of fealty, and to take only such oaths as are admitted by canonic law. He declared that in no case, and under no pretext, could they be subjected to other charges than those laid upon their fellow-citizens. Finally, he declared that they were the masters of their own money, and could employ it as they pleased in favour of their less fortunate brethren.

Some of the nobles here and there still tried to resist, but their resistance was condemned beforehand. Two more very short Pontifical letters sufficed to overcome the rest. In them the Pope shows himself confident of victory. He merely asks

<sup>1</sup> This sum was considerable. It amounted to 3 ounces and 15 tares a month (220 francs 92 centimes) for each man of arms not present.

the Bishops to continue to keep watch in their dioceses. "Do not allow the Tertiaries to be molested anywhere," he says. And they were no more molested. The feudal system was vanquished. It had lost its most numerous clients. For the future it would see an enfranchised multitude, master of its own movements and actions, and strong with all the resources of association. It was not the *tiers état*, as has been wrongly said, but it may have been, to follow the idea of the Marquis Gino Capponi, "Italian democracy taking its origin, and in some sort its consecration, in the rule of S. Francis."<sup>1</sup>

Only a statesman of decided opinions, accustomed to the management of affairs, would have been able to judge of the possibility of success in such a delicate matter. Bernardo da Bessa says distinctly that Francis, when he wrote the Rule of the Third Order at Florence, was assisted by Cardinal Ugolino. It is difficult to assign the respective parts of the two collaborators. Certainly we would not wish to detract from the Saint whose name the Rule bears, and who has given so many proofs of originality and good judgment; but it seems probable that it was the eminent prelate who discovered how to attack successfully a social order of things of which the Church had constant and increasing reason to complain. Therefore we attribute to him, if not the idea, at least the compilation of the clauses whose consequences we have just pointed out. The vigour with which Gregory IX. took in hand the cause of the Tertiaries thus explains itself. The Pontiff defended the work of the Cardinal.

A new force had arisen, and it was immediately felt in the agitated politics of that period. The Tertiaries had been defended and enfranchised by the Church. They ranged themselves like a powerful army on the side of their benefactress. They gave, after they had received. Their assistance came opportunely. The Papacy was contending with Frederick II., the Emperor of Germany. No one can question the brilliant qualities of this prince. It has been said of him that he was

<sup>1</sup> "*Storia di Firenze*," tom. i. p. 180.



more like a modern than a mediæval prince, and truly, in breadth of mind and the science of government, he was beyond his age. But he clouded these gifts by frightful vices and open irreligion. The Church had seldom had a more redoubtable enemy upon the throne. His best concerted and longest sustained enterprises were directed against her.

With the weight of his imperial word he renewed the accusations, then dying out, of the Waldensians and Albigenses. "The primitive Church," he said, "was founded in poverty and simplicity. Then, like a fruitful mother, she produced all those pious personages who are inscribed in the catalogue of Saints." "Formerly," he said, still more sharply, "the priests of the Lord saw the angels face to face; they worked many miracles; their sanctity, not the temporal sword, made kings submit easily to them. In our days the Church is entirely worldly; her ministers, intoxicated with luxury, care little for the Lord." This was written in circulars, and as the circulars did not travel fast enough, he sent out emissaries, a kind of lay missionaries, who convoked the people by the sound of the bells and mounted the pulpits. "They preach publicly," says a contemporary, "that the Pope is a heretic, that the prelates are demoniacs, and the priests stained with sins are unworthy to accomplish the mystery of the Eucharist." Undoubtedly the virtues of the new Orders were held up in answer to these preachers. "Have no faith," they replied, "either in the Preachers, the Minors, the Cistercians, or any of those wicked monks. We and our friends alone are they who teach you truth and faith according to justice. If God had not appointed us to remedy the ruin of His Church, He would have made the stones cry out. Talk no more of the Pope. Pray rather for the Lord Emperor Frederick and his son Conrad. They are the perfect ones and the just."

He tried to despoil the Church of all temporal power, the natural result of the maxims we have mentioned above. "Our intention," he said, "has always been, God is our witness, to bring back the ecclesiastics, and especially the

great ones, to such a state that they may persevere unto the end in the ways of the primitive Church." He observed besides that, thanks to the providence of God, the magnificent kingdom of Sicily in the south, and the powerful Germanic dominion in the north, were under his laws. "It is doubtless," he added, "in order that the intermediate part that is called Italy, being encircled on all sides by our forces, may also return to our obedience, and for that end there remains little more for us to do." "Our determined resolution," he wrote to the Archbishop of Messina, "is to replace, under our hand, not only the duchy of Spoleto and the Marches of Ancona, but all the lands which have been too long detached from the empire to form the patrimony of the Church." Rome was not excepted. "It is," he said, "the nominal capital of the Roman empire; it must be subject to us. We will subjugate it, for the land is ours, and the sea recognises our laws; all prospers according to our desires."

He aspired to found a national Church, of which he should be the chief. He assumed all the titles that custom has reserved for expressing the supreme power of the Church. In the public acts he was called "the holy vicar of God, the corner stone of the Church, the pious and holy father whose blessed feet must unceasingly be embraced," &c. Although he made no secret of his incredulity, they went so far as to proclaim him "instructed by celestial intelligence, of which his majesty was the real image amongst visible things." He never expressly unmasked his intentions, but they were so manifest, that no one could mistake the end at which he was aiming. "He sets himself up as an angel of light," exclaimed Gregory IX. "He is planning to overthrow the chair of S. Peter, and to substitute the ceremonies of the pagan empire for the Christian faith. He penetrates into the temple and usurps the functions of the priest." S. Louis' knowledge of law was equally disconcerted. "We know not what name to call him by," the monarch wrote to the Cardinals, "since he wishes to be king and priest both at the same time. The law forbids royalty and the priesthood to be united in

one person. Let him show by virtue of what principle he arrogates to himself the dignity of the priesthood."

Such was the prince to whom the Church found herself opposed, and such were his ideas throughout a reign of more than thirty years. Had this tempest arisen earlier, when the hierarchy had fallen into discredit, and the populace, hungering after virtue, were rushing to the meetings of the Waldensians and the Cathari, the danger would have been extreme. Many have thought that the painful schism which took place three centuries later at Luther's voice, might have been effected then by the powerful and impious hand of the emperor.<sup>1</sup> It is a very plausible notion, but, happily, God tempered the wind to the shorn lamb. At the beginning of the war, the Church of Jesus Christ had been reinvigorated by the reformation of the Mendicants; miracles had reappeared, in spite of Frederick's denials; and with the return of holiness in those who had the honour of representing the truth in the midst of men, their popularity also was re-established. There was hope, then, that the good fight would be well fought, and, in the end, the cause of God, after diverse fortunes, did indeed gain the victory.

The new Orders were in great measure the instruments of this triumph. Friars Minor, and Preaching Friars, sometimes openly, sometimes disguised as pilgrims or colporteurs, vied with each other in fostering resistance, exalting the love of the Church, and everywhere publishing the pontifical censures. Frederick, who knew their work, regarded them as his worst enemies. Once when, by denouncing him as excommunicated in the two Sicilies, they had, according to his own expression, wounded him in the pupil of his eye, he roared like a lion,

<sup>1</sup> This institution (that of the Mendicants) perhaps retarded for three centuries the rupture realised by Luther (*Cesare Cantu*), "The Reformation in Italy," vol. i. p. 167. Machiavelli said in more general terms: "If by SS. Francis and Dominic our religion had not been drawn back to its origin, it would have been entirely extinguished. These two, by their poverty and their imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, revived it in men's hearts where it was effaced ("Third Book of Discourses," ch. viii.).

and commanded the captain-general of the kingdom to have them burnt without mercy, them and their followers, whenever they were found carrying a message from the Sovereign Pontiff. Oftener he was content to decry them by means of his emissaries, or to spread little pamphlets written against them in verse, or to make them appear odious and ridiculous. Sometimes, and it was a way of owning their influence, he tried to gain them with flattery. "We are disposed," he wrote to the Dominicans assembled at Paris in the general Chapter, "we are disposed to favour and support your holy Order not only by words but by deeds." To the Franciscans he made still further advances. It is well known that he found credit with some of them, and that even the successor of S. Francis, Brother Elias, entered so thoroughly into the emperor's interests, that he was pleased to look upon him "as a friend and a man of his house."

The part played by the Tertiaries was no less active and efficacious. They composed the body of the communal militias which opposed Frederick so strenuously, and appeared on all the battle-fields and at all the breaches. In 1167, the formation of the Lombard League had been regarded as a kind of prodigy doing the greatest honour to the policy of Alexander III. Under, or rather against Frederick, leagues were formed and re-formed at all points throughout Italy. We find them in the north, about the powerful city of Milan. In the States of the Church, Perugia and Assisi are their centres. They existed even in the two Sicilies, where the emperors always considered themselves to be in their own home. Evidently a new spirit was abroad, giving cohesion to the forces that had hitherto been scattered, and this spirit came manifestly from the Third Order, which, by awakening moral energy amongst the populace, armed them to defend their rights against the brutality of despotism.

Nor did contemporaries mistake the true cause of the courage displayed. The intrepid old man who supported, animated, and directed all these combatants from his



pontifical chair, rendered this testimony to the "brethren of the militia of Jesus Christ." "The perfidious heretics, like the children of Israel, have united themselves with the Gentiles, and abusing for evil the power of a proud king who favours their criminal enterprises, they have introduced another Antiochus into the temple. . . . As to you, it is the Lord who has inspired you with the generous resolution of exposing yourselves to death rather than leave the deeds of these sacrilegious men unpunished. You renew the courage of the Maccabees. You have wisely preferred the glory of fighting for Jesus Christ before that of serving a mortal prince."

This praise was not without meaning. The brethren of Penance had accomplished prodigies. The humblest had raised themselves above their condition, the youngest above their age. What a light the life of S. Rose of Viterbo, the little Franciscan Tertiary, throws upon this point! She was one of those predestined children in whom divine wisdom blossoms at an early age. She was full of attractions and grace. Men contemplated her in admiration, and the birds came to settle on her hands and shoulders. Her vivacity was so great, it seemed as if her little body had wings. She slept very little, and often rose in the night, and escaping from the house, went about the streets singing hymns with a strong, harmonious voice. She loved God with all her heart and all her soul. Before she was ten years old she began to preach against the heretics. They, after having been beaten some years before with their allies the Ghibelines, were beginning again to lift up their heads. Cardinal Régnier, the Archbishop of the town, notified the danger in a public letter, and his appeal nowhere found a better response than in the heart of Rose. The child spoke aloud what the friends of the Church were thinking in their hearts. Standing on a large stone, she preached with the liberty of her tender age that the emperor was a heretic, that he must be resisted, and the standard of the faith must be kept high. The Guelphs encouraged and applauded this language, in which their own opinions were reflected. A nucleus of opposition was formed around the little tribune.

The Ghibelines went in a body to the prefect, who belonged to their party. "If you do not send away Rose and her parents," they said, "we will drive you away yourself." The prefect in alarm did not even endeavour to bring them to better sentiments. He sent apparitors to apprehend the child and her parents, and when they had been brought before him, he ordered them to leave the town immediately, under pain of being cast into prison and having all their goods confiscated. It was the depth of winter, the snow had been falling uninterruptedly for some days, the roads were impracticable. The parents begged for a little respite. "It is death," they said, "to go under these conditions." "Well, you can die then," answered the prefect, "I want nothing better." Then they went away with their child, and through many perils climbed the steep slopes of Mount Cimini. The next day they reached Soriano, where a kind welcome made up to them a little for their fatigues. They had been living there peacefully nearly a year, when Rose learnt by a revelation that their exile was about to finish with the death of the emperor. She did not keep this good news to herself. The next morning she went out on the great piazza and said to the people: "Listen, ye faithful ones of Christ, and fear not to rejoice. I announce to you that in a few days you will be triumphant." She made this prophecy on the 5th December. Ten days afterwards they learned that the Emperor had died on the 13th, at Castel Fiorentino, near Lucca. It was deliverance for the Guelphs. Rose immediately returned to Viterbo. All the city came out to meet her. They made her an ovation, as though she had been the chief of a victorious party returning to his fellow-citizens.

To sum up, the Third Order of S. Francis, in the thirteenth century, exercised a religious, social, and political influence. It was a nursery of Saints, it accomplished the emancipation of the middle classes and peasants, and put legions of defenders at the service of the Church at a time when it was in a most critical situation.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CREATION OF A SCHOOL, 1221-1222.

FRANCIS left Tuscany in the autumn of 1221, after he had drawn up the Rule of the Third Order at Florence. He stayed but a few weeks at Assisi, and then set out for South Italy.

In passing through the eternal city, he met the chief of the powerful house of Orsini, Matthew di Rubeis, who courteously invited him to dinner. As Francis was going into the palace of the illustrious patrician, he found a number of poor people sitting in the court, to whom food was being distributed. He could not resist this opportunity, and out of respect to his lady he went and sat down amongst them. The nobleman, who had seen it all from a window, came and joined him. "Brother Francis," he said, "since you will not come to me, I must come and sit with you." And with the most perfect good grace, he announced to the poor people that Francis and he would eat with them. This was not the only event of that day. Orsini had a son of tender age named John. After dinner he had him brought to Francis that he might bless him. The servant of God took him in his arms and, after having contemplated him affectionately, he predicted to the father that the child would one day be an honour to his family and would become Pope. Then addressing the infant as though he had the use of reason, he recommended him to be favourable towards the brethren. "He will not belong to the Order," he said, as he gave him back to his father, "but he will be its protector. Our brethren will rejoice in sheltering beneath his shadow. I see in his little hands great benefits reserved to us." Fifty-five years later, in 1277, the prophecy was fulfilled. The child,

who had become a Cardinal and the protector of the Order, was elected Pope under the name of Nicolas III. One of the cares of his pontificate was to watch over the Franciscan family "like the pupil of his eye." According to Philip of Perugia, he loved to repeat that his father had been the first Tertiary in Rome. Orsini did indeed deserve this title, for at the end of his interview with Francis, he was enrolled in the new militia.

Francis did not delay longer in Rome after this good fortune. He was eager to go and evangelise all the southern region that as yet he did not know. His Order had been established there for some years. The houses, as early as 1218, had been deemed numerous enough to form three provinces, those of the Terra di Lavoro, Apulia, and Calabria. In visiting them for the first time, the holy Founder wished to strengthen in their vocation those who composed them, and to announce the Word of God to the people who, although they were more directly dependent on the empire, were none the less attached to the Church and eager to hear him. He was still almost in the full vigour of his strength, and we cannot doubt that he left behind him, as he always did, a track of light and of holiness. Unfortunately, his historians have neglected to record what would have been most interesting to us, and have, on this occasion, only related two or three anecdotes.

The first is one of those instances of chivalric charity that we meet with several times in his life. He was at Celano, a little town in the Abruzzi, in the Bishop's palace, when an old woman in rags came and asked alms of him. Francis, as usual, had no money, but he was wearing a piece of stuff that a certain Tiburtinus, a friend of the Friars, had just offered to him to preserve him from the cold. He gave this sort of cloak to the poor woman. "Take it," he said, "and make yourself a dress of it, for you truly are in need of one." The old woman did not wait to be told a second time, and fearing that some one might want to deprive her of so rich a present, as soon as she got home she took



her scissors and began to cut up the cloth. But when all the pieces were put together, there was still a bit wanting to complete the dress. What was to be done? On reflection she thought that he who had been so generous towards her might be so again. She returned to Francis and told him that a good piece was yet wanting to make all right. The Saint's companion had received a mantle like his own; Francis turned entreating eyes towards him. "My brother," he said, "you hear this woman; for the love of God let us suffer a little cold and give her complete happiness." The brother at once presented her with his cloak as Francis had done with his. They were both despoiled, but the good woman had her dress.

In the following anecdote we see how Francis joined prophetic penetration to his warm-hearted kindness. It was again in the neighbourhood of Celano. All classes were disputing for the possession of the poor man of Jesus Christ. One of the rich noblemen came in the name of the rest to entreat him to accept hospitality in his castle. After some resistance, Francis, who never liked to disappoint people, accepted the offer. So he went, and the noble family received him with great demonstrations of joy. They were seated at table, when just as the servant of God was imploring a blessing on the repast, it was revealed to him that his host had but a few more minutes to live. Saddened, but keeping his self-possession, Francis drew him aside. "My brother and host," he said in a tone of tender compassion, "be courageous and listen to what I have to tell you. Your minutes are numbered. I have just deferred to your wishes in coming to you, now, defer I pray you to my advice. Put your conscience in order and confess your sins with sincere contrition. God, in receiving you to Himself, intends to make a return to you for all you wished to do for us His little servants." The lord of the castle believed what was told him. He made his confession to the Saint's companion, and having prepared himself to appear before God, he felt calm enough to sit down to table as if nothing had happened.

The repast had hardly begun when he suddenly sank and gave up his spirit. S. Bonaventura, who relates this fact, does not doubt that in this tragedy there was grace of salvation and blessing. "This knight," he says, "had received a prophet. According to the Gospel, he had a prophet's reward."

This is all we know of the sojourn of S. Francis in the Abruzzi. He passed on into Apulia, where on the way to Bari he once more had an opportunity of showing his horror of money. He and his companion saw on the road a pouch that some merchant had dropped, and that looked as if it was full of money. Francis was going on as though he had not seen it, but his companion took it in a different light. He pointed out the purse to the Saint. "We ought to take it," he said; "it will be a fortune for the poor." "Let us have nothing to do with it," replied Francis. "I see in this only a snare of the devil; besides, we cannot dispose of what does not belong to us." Then they continued on their way, but the poor brother regretted the lost opportunity, and complained aloud. "Well, I consent," said Francis; "let us go back." A young man was there, sitting on the margin of a well. Francis called him. "Come with us," he said, "you shall be our witness." When they were near the purse, "Let us stop," said the Saint, and he knelt down and prayed for a time. "Now go," he said as he rose. The brother began to feel vaguely uneasy, but he went, and was just stooping to pick up the coveted purse when a great viper glided out of it hissing. He went back frightened. "See," said Francis, "money is only a dangerous serpent for Jesus Christ's poor men."

After he had gone through these provinces, the servant of God went towards the north. It is asserted that he passed through Gaeta. At the news of his arrival, so great a multitude gathered on the quays of the town, that he was obliged to get into a little boat in order to preach. The boat, like the one our Lord used on the lake of Gennesareth, went of itself to a place from which he could be heard.

From Gaeta, Francis had two routes before him—the one led to Rome, the other into the Sabine mountains. There is a tradition that he chose the latter, and that he went to Subiaco to venerate the grotto in which S. Benedict had prepared himself by prayer for the extraordinary part God had in store for him. No pilgrimage could have been more congenial to Francis, and for ourselves we can admire the spectacle of a Saint who was about to give a new form to the monastic life, turning aside from his path to do homage to the Saint who had instituted that life so grandly. But the historian must often give up what would please him, and we are obliged to confess that the best critics do not reckon this visit as an established fact.<sup>1</sup>

Francis returned to Assisi before the feast of Pentecost. A sad event recalled him earlier than he would have wished. His vicar-general, the gentle Peter Catani, had died some weeks before on the 10th March 1221. He had been a devoted auxiliary, faithful to his master's intentions, and, according to his lights, solely given to doing good. Francis appreciated his qualities and regretted him sincerely. He even erected a little monument to him that was quite after his own heart. This was a stone, on which, as well as they could, they engraved his name and the date of his death.<sup>2</sup> The good superior had this stone fixed into the wall of his beloved church of the Portiuncula. It is there still. Those who appreciate modest lives that are more anxious to be than to seem, cannot look upon it without emotion.

Now arose the question, whom should Francis choose as

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Acta SS.," tom. ii., Oct., p. 853. In these days we are inclined to be less severe than the Bollandists. The portraits of Francis painted at Subiaco are so ancient, that their existence is not easy to explain, unless the Saint really made this pilgrimage.

<sup>2</sup> The epitaph is inscribed: Anno mcccxi. vi. Id. Martii. There is a difficulty here in the chronology. The year then began on the 25th March. The 10th of that month, which for the people of that time belonged to the year 1221, for us belongs to the year 1222. On the other hand, Giordano di Giano, who assisted at the Chapter held in that year, says that it took place in 1221.

the successor of Peter Catani? It seems probable that he thought of Bernard of Quintavalle. He had a secret partiality for this son, whom God had sent him first before any of the others. The foundation of the convent at Bologna, and more recently the office of minister-general that he had worthily exercised in Spain, had raised Bernard to considerable importance amongst them all. Francis was far from overlooking these qualifications, but he knew that for some time the brother had been subject to interior trials, to real temptations. He was not troubled beyond measure by this circumstance. "It is a trial," he said; "he will come out of it and be the greater for it afterwards." Still he feared that it might impede the entire liberty of mind necessary for a position of authority, and therefore he did not elect Bernard. Judging by the results, he may perhaps have exaggerated this fear. When the one whom he chose departed so sadly from the beaten track, no one resisted him more decidedly than Bernard, and, as Bernardo da Bessa observes, he could do so better than anyone else, because he was respected by all. This feeling was shown after his death. The brethren publicly accused themselves of not having done him justice. "We did not know him sufficiently," they said. And this reflection added to their grief. The man who merited this testimony might have done much for the good of his brethren.

Having set aside Bernard of Quintavalle, Francis, for various reasons, passed over all his first companions, and fixed his choice on a man, still young, whose name we have already mentioned, and of whom we must now speak more fully. He was called Brother Elias, and was born in a suburb of Assisi called Beviglio. His parents were poor, and in his early youth Elias assisted them in their trade of mattress-making. But soon, thanks to his gifts and intelligence, he became a school-master. He was in the exercise of that profession when he, in company with some other young men of the place, offered himself to Francis. Once within the Order, his progress was extraordinary. He



had no more advantages than the rest of the brethren, but his fine faculties developed rapidly, and, as it were, of their own accord, in the congenial atmosphere. In a few years he understood and saw into everything, and as far as any one could be, he was prepared for everything. His distinguished manners and person were such as to extort admiration from those who judged him most severely. "Where throughout Christendom could a man be found as gracious and as famous as Elias?" (Eccleston, p. 23). He preached eloquently; his conversation enlightened and charmed the most delicate minds. We have seen S. Clara's sister, the young Abbess of Montecœli, request as a benefit the help of his visits. According to Bernardo da Bessa, in business matters he was unequalled for the clearness of his views and his happy choice of means. Though he was not a priest, his authority was such, that at the Chapter of 1217 he was chosen minister-general for Tuscany, the first and most important province in the Order. His government was active, and splendid order reigned in all the communities. The number of the houses and of the brethren was almost doubled. A fortunate event added to his reputation. A celebrated German preacher, Cesar of Spires, on hearing him preach, entered the Order, and led the most edifying life in it. This union of qualities decided Francis. In choosing such a man as vicar, doubtless the holy Founder thought he had found a true leader, one who, in his humility, he imagined would be able to do what he himself had been unable to accomplish. Notwithstanding all his penetration, he had not discovered the existence of certain aspirations in Elias, aspirations that had been hitherto well restrained, and continued to be so during his own lifetime, but which completely gained the upper hand after his death. In his heart, Brother Elias was more sensible to external than to moral greatness; his idea of the religious life was the powerful Benedictine Abbey, rather than the humble convent Francis desired. Attached to the person of his holy superior with filial affection, he yet regarded him as more to

be admired than imitated. His misfortunes and those of the Order that were involved in them afterwards, were all attributable to this.

It is certain that the new vicar-general was presented to the brethren at the Chapter which, in conformity with the Rule, was opened at the feast of Pentecost. In regard to this Chapter, we have the testimony of one of those who took part in it. It was held in the wood which at that time existed near S. Mary of the Portiuncula. A great number of tents and twenty-three long tables had been set under the trees, *sub umbraculis*, the narrative says. The assembled brethren, professed and novices, numbered five thousand. Cardinal Ugolino, probably detained at a distance by some legation, did not come. He was replaced by another friend of the Saint, Raniero Capoccio, Cardinal deacon, assisted by several Bishops and a certain number of religious belonging to other Orders. One of these Bishops celebrated the solemn Mass. Francis filled the office of deacon and chanted the Gospel. On one of the following days he preached a sermon on the words: *Benedictus Dominus Deus meus qui docet manus meas ad prælium*. He explained the power of the arms with which a Minor fights the good fight, namely, virtue, patience, holy examples. This meeting was most edifying. It is impossible, the chronicler says, to express how much charity, patience, humility, deference, and fraternal cordiality was displayed there. The population of the neighbourhood showed the same willingness to support the brethren as they did in 1219. The abundance of bread and wine was so great, that on the seventh day the brethren announced that they would receive nothing more, and closed their door. In spite of this precaution, they had to stay two days longer than had been fixed, to eat up the provisions that had already been brought.

We have a vivid picture of the last sitting of the Chapter, the one in which, according to custom, the obediences were distributed. Elias presided. The holy Founder, from humility, was seated at the feet of his vicar. While Elias

was assigning the various posts, Francis was struck with an idea that seemed to come from heaven. We have said how unfortunate the first mission into Germany had been. A second, the following year, sent principally into Hungary, had had still less success. The shepherds in the country had gone so far as to set their dogs upon the brethren, taking them for vagabonds by their poor costume. Francis felt all at once impelled to make a third attempt. As he was unwell that day and unable to make himself heard, he pulled his vicar by the tunic and explained his project to him in a low voice. Elias, standing up, publicly announced the subject in these words: "My brethren, this is what the Brother tells me,"—they called Francis the Brother pre-eminently,—"there is a country, Germany, whose inhabitants are Christians, and full of devotion. You have often seen them pass through our country, walking in the sunshine, with long sticks and great boots, singing the praises of God and of the Saints, and going to places of pilgrimage. Several of our brethren have already been sent among them: they did not succeed; they even came back after having been beaten. Now, I oblige no one to undertake this mission again, but if any one is sufficiently filled with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls to venture upon it, I promise him the same and even a still greater degree of merit for obedience as if he went beyond the sea." A shudder of fear ran through the assembly, for no mission was more dreaded, but very soon their brave hearts recovered themselves. Nearly ninety brothers gave in their names. There were, as was natural, a few of German origin, amongst others Cesar of Spires, who had been converted by Brother Elias; there was also a contingent of Italians, amongst whom we find Thomas of Celano, who afterwards wrote the life of S. Francis so admirably, and Brother John of Plan Carpino, for whom this mission was but the beginning of others more distant.

They were all made to come out of the ranks and stand on one side, until their demand could be definitely granted. As they were waiting together, a certain Brother Giordano,

from the little town of Giano, near Spoleto, who had been one of those who were most alarmed and had taken good care not to present themselves, thought he would go and visit them. "They will certainly die," he said, "and it will be as it was with our martyrs in Morocco. I shall not even have known their names." So he went into their ranks, and accosting each one he asked, "Who are you? What is your country?" By these questions he wished to be able to say, when he heard of their martyrdom, "Oh! I knew this one or that other." At last, in his questioning he came to a deacon from the neighbourhood of Mount Gargano. "I," said this one, "am called Palmerio, and I come from Monte Gargano; but you, my brother, you belong to us, you are going to travel with us." "No, no, I am not," replied Brother Giordano. "I only want to know you." "But you are," answered the deacon, who loved a joke; and he took him by the shoulders and made him sit down amongst them. Giordano was resisting, when Cesar of Spires was proclaimed minister for Germany, with the faculty of taking with him those whom he thought fit. The brethren immediately surrounded him, and begged him not to leave out Brother Giordano. "I am not going," the latter continued to cry out. Cesar appearing disposed to take him, they went to the vicar-general, who said to Giordano, "Will you or will you not go to Germany? I command you by holy obedience to make a decision." This command threw the brother into great perplexity. On the one hand, if he did not go to Germany, he feared the reproaches of his conscience, because he would have followed his own will, and on the other, if he went, the Germans were ferocious, and he was not sure whether he would make a very good martyr. To escape from his embarrassment he consulted a religious who, in the last mission, had been robbed fifteen times in Hungary. "In your place," said this one, "I would not choose. I should say to the brother, I will neither go nor stay; I will do as you command me." Giordano followed this advice, and Elias ordered him to accompany Cesar. He obeyed, and getting the better of his fears, he



worked as usefully as the bravest. It is he who, in a valuable chronicle, has related how the Minors were established in Germany.

Almost directly after this Chapter, if not in the Chapter itself, Francis had to decide a question which was to influence the future of the Order quite as much as the choice of his vicar. The question was broached on the following occasion. We left S. Antony in the Hermitage of Mount S. Paul. A fortuitous circumstance drew him forth, as a light from under a bushel. In the last Ember days of Lent, he accompanied several brethren of the province to Forli, where they were to be ordained. It was then customary, before the ceremony, to address some appropriate words to the candidates. This time the expected preacher had not come, and in the embarrassment caused by his absence, the guardian of the Minors ordered Antony to replace him instantly. The former declared afterwards that in doing so he had not expected much. "He did not think," he said, "that he had ever read any other book than his breviary." Antony, showing great nervousness, in fact began "in a very simple fashion," but as he advanced in his subject, he showed such knowledge of the spiritual life, and became so eloquent, that his audience was filled with admiration. The guardian of S. Paul's was more charmed than any one. As soon as they returned to the Hermitage, he profited by the approaching solemnities of Easter to put Antony to further trial. Each time there was the same power of doctrine in the orator, and the same enthusiasm in the audience. "From that moment all the brethren venerated him in whom, as by a miracle, they had discovered the light of divine wisdom." We can easily understand the effect it had upon their minds. We have said that up to that time there was no school in the Order. Those who had been ordained priests beforehand, brought in a little doctrine, the others, and they were the most numerous, were dependant on the inspiration of the moment, and on their qualities of nature or of grace. Doubtless, in this way those who were best endowed, and those who were the most holy,

were able to supply what was needed. But there were many who could not make up for their deficiencies, and besides, it is well known that there is always more or less vagueness in the words of those who have had no scientific training. Several of them were beginning to take note of this defect, and the sentiment became stronger after the arrival of the Preaching Friars at Bologna. They had preachers amongst them who were nourished on theology, whom the voice of the public had named *solemn preachers*, because they treated their subjects amply, and the populace flocked in crowds to hear them. The brilliant success of Antony, who was equal to the best of them, on account of his studies at S. Croix, finally enlightened the least observant. All now saw that what had answered well in the early beginning, no longer corresponded to the wants of the Order. The preachers must be put into the way of substituting a wider kind of instruction, and one more supported by theology, in place of the familiar homilies they had hitherto been contented with. There was but one means of providing for this, namely, to open schools through which, if not all the brethren, at least those destined for the ministry of preaching must pass.

Brother Gratian undertook to go to Assisi to lay this desire of the brethren of his province before the holy Founder. He accomplished his task with great success. The new vicar-general, Brother Elias, was predisposed to favour anything calculated to increase the influence of the Order, and he welcomed the proposal submitted to him with the greatest cordiality.

It was more difficult to convince Francis. Not that he had any prejudice against knowledge. A short time after he had settled at the Portiuncula with his companions, he one day saw some pieces of manuscript lying on the ground. He picked them up carefully lest they should be trodden on. "The name of God is perhaps there," he said. Now it happened that the leaves he picked up were the fragments of an ancient work. A brother remarked it. "My brother," said Francis, "that makes no difference, the letters which

compose the glorious name of God are none the less there." Then he added: "The good there is in these writings belongs neither to paganism nor to humanity, but to God alone, who is the author of all good." There was no fear that a man of such wide judgment on the morality of all literature worthy of the name, could be mistaken about the value of theological training. Francis was quite ready to appreciate the advantages of such training. Like all just minds, his required exactness of idea. He had always recommended this exactness in those whom he sent on missions, and as the Order developed, he insisted still more on this point. The truth is, that in spite of his care, some irregularities had occurred. More than one brother, insufficiently prepared, had perhaps been led into exaggerations that were to be regretted. He who had set himself to teach others had had to be brought back himself into the truth. There was only one step between instruction given in this way and a preparatory training.

And yet Francis hesitated before taking this step. His first idea, and his most cherished ideal, had always been the Gospel and the apostolic preaching. Poor, humble fishermen, transformed by grace and immediately inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the beginning had changed the world. He thought this miracle could be repeated. In resting upon knowledge they would seem to be mistrusting God, and rendering the cross of Jesus Christ a vain thing.

For several years God had accomplished great things by this multitude of uncultivated, illiterate brethren. Perhaps this success implied that they should persevere in the way they had begun. A change of the kind proposed threatened to take away the feature of the work that the populace most loved. This fear had seemed to Francis so serious that he had closed a school that had been opened in that very city of Bologna where they now asked him to open another.

It is easy to see how specious those arguments were. To a less strong and sincere mind they might probably have been

enough to hinder all progress. But, as we have said, besides a secret affinity with knowledge, Francis had this also, that he always recognised the will of God in the necessities that were imposed on him. It was here that the brethren were able to touch him. They maintained that the great force of the heretics lay in the captious arguments in which they enveloped their errors; that there was but one remedy against false science, and that was true science; that the moment had come for instituting one or more centres where it could be taught.

Francis made no more objections. He admitted that a certain number of brethren, those who seemed the most qualified, should be initiated into the secrets of theology. He consented that the school should be founded at Bologna, as the minister of that province requested. Finally, he approved as first master and lecturer the man whom an unanimous voice designed; he even wrote the following letter to him on the occasion: "*To my very dear Brother Antony, Brother Francis, salutation in our Lord.*—I consent to your teaching holy theology to our brethren, on condition that such teaching does not stifle the spirit of prayer either in yourself or in others. I hold firmly to this point, for it is our rule. Farewell." The programme is admirable. Science must be neither dry nor sterile, it must warm the soul and conduct it to God. It was a concise intimation to the future masters of the Order on what conditions true masters are formed.

Antony at once began the work that had been entrusted to him. The elevated thought and fervour of spirit that had made his preaching a success, were equally found in his instructions; he shed light and joy into the souls of the brethren who listened to him. Soon the report of his fine teaching spread abroad. The students of the university in those days were capable of uniting the study of theology to that of the Pandects. They solicited the honour of being admitted amongst the disciples of the Saint, and easily obtained their desire, which at that time was not con-



sidered at all extraordinary, and they vied with the sons of Francis in proclaiming that the city possessed one more great master.

Another might have found legitimate cause for satisfaction at this success. Antony, with rare humility, did not think himself possessed of all the qualifications he needed. Mystic theology was the form of sacred science that could best aid him in following the recommendation Francis had given him when he invested him with his functions. It indeed, beyond all others, addresses itself to the entire man, penetrates him with divine love, and constrains him to resolve his studies into adoration, love, and prayer. Antony was no stranger to this theology, but he began to ask himself whether he knew all its points thoroughly. He had heard that it was being taught at Vercelli with extraordinary force and brilliance. If he could go there and converse with those illustrious masters, and, if need be, sit at their feet, he would gain more light and would have more authority when he returned to Bologna to resume his instructions. He opened his mind to his provincial minister, who approved of his idea and gave it entire support. As soon as a favourable opportunity occurred, Antony left his chair and his disciples for a time, and set out for Vercelli.<sup>1</sup>

His expectations were not disappointed. The masters who taught in the schools of the city were quite worthy of their reputation. The best known amongst them, if not the most celebrated, was a Frenchman named Thomas Gallo, who had been initiated in the secrets of theology in the Abbey of S. Victor at Paris, and whom the instances of the Cardinal Guala Bicchiere, the former Legate in France, had recently brought to Vercelli. He professed at the

<sup>1</sup> There is a tradition that he was accompanied by Adam du Marais. It is a mistake, Adam did not enter the Order till 1226. The truth is, that he, like Antony, was in relation with Thomas Gallo. In his correspondence, there is a letter addressed to the master, in which he requests a communication about an "Exposition on the theological ministry" which he had recently published. *V. Eccleston*, p. 206.

Abbey of S. Andrew. We have no direct testimony as to the quality of his instruction, but his existing works enable us to have an idea of the opinions that formed its basis. Under the title "*Extractiones*," he wrote successively a paraphrase of the Areopagite books, a treaty on the "Seven Degrees of Contemplation," and a commentary on the "Song of Songs." We find nearly the same object in all these works. Thomas was, what the contemporaries called him, a *master in hierarchy*, that is to say, a man almost exclusively occupied with the communications which God deigns to make of Himself throughout the scale of creation, from the seraphim who stand beside His throne to the pure and humble soul who contemplates Him from this earth. He was a sage entirely after Antony's own heart. He earnestly desired to be admitted to converse with him, and when his request was granted, we may imagine with what fullness and delight he made use of the privilege. The master himself, struck with what he daily discovered in his disciple, has left us a vivid impression of him in one of his writings. "Often," he says, "love penetrates where mere external knowledge never could attain. I have had experience of this in the person of the holy Brother Antony, of the Order of Minors, with whom I have been intimately connected. He was less well versed than others in profane letters, but he had such purity of soul, and such richness of heart, that as soon as he had approached mystic theology he made rapid progress in it. I may say of him what was said of John the Baptist, he was a burning and a shining light. All fire within, he shed abroad the light that was in him."

And a still more glorious testimony has been rendered to Antony, perhaps in this very city of Vercelli. In the forty-third chapter of the third book of the "*Imitation*," we read: "I am he who in an instant elevateth an humble mind to comprehend more reasons of eternal truth, than if a man had studied ten years in the schools. I teach without noise of words, without confusion of opinions, without pomp of honour,

without conflict of argument. There was one who, in loving me much, learnt divine things and spoke wonders. He profited more by relinquishing everything than by studying subtleties."

Many modern writers, convinced that the "Imitation" was written in the Middle Ages, and finding these words identical with those of Thomas Gallo, unhesitatingly assert that S. Antony is the subject of this magnificent eulogy. The same epoch could not have borne two men to whom this fine praise was equally applicable.

This idea has much weight in itself, and it seems still better founded when we remark that the author of the "Imitation" certainly wrote under the influence of a strong admiration for S. Francis. Several of the maxims in his text are borrowed from him; in favour of him he departs from his usual habit of not naming those from whom he quotes, not even the Fathers of the Church, or the Evangelists; he closely follows his doctrine and even his expressions on love, on Jesus Christ crucified, on true spiritual joy. Such acquaintance, or rather such intimacy, if the "Imitation" was really written in the thirteenth century, could only have resulted from long conversations with a fervent disciple of the Saint. And where could such conversations have taken place with more probability than at Vercelli, between S. Antony, still young in years, and the immortal author, whatever his name may have been, who was perhaps as yet far from the time when he would begin his work, but was already closely observant of the ways of God with His Saints?

However this may have been, the time spent in Vercelli was fortunate for Antony; he grew strong and expanded by contact with eminent men. On his return to Bologna he was preparing to make use of the light he had gained, when an obedience sent from Assisi suddenly snatched him away from Italy and gave him to France.

Francis commissioned him to go into Languedoc to maintain the controversy against the Albigenses. This province had,

we know, been at first the theatre of S. Dominic's apostolate, but as this great man in 1221 had established his disciples in Bologna near the Minors, Francis, at about the same period, had not thought he was encroaching on private ground by founding houses in the south of France. Thus the two Orders, which God had given to His Church as luminaries in these stormy times, mingled together and carried on their labours side by side. They helped and supported one another without rivalry or jealousy. Their friendship, which has since lived on and become celebrated, though human weakness has been the cause of more than one attack upon it, then had in it all the beauty of young fresh life.

The first missionaries sent by Francis arrived in Languedoc at a favourable moment. People were just emerging from the bloody troubles of the first crusade. The brethren, by their virtues and their conspicuous poverty, seemed to bring the peace of Jesus Christ to all. They were welcomed as though they bore the olive branch in their hands; the conquered Albigenses were no less charmed than the victorious Catholics. One of the friars, formerly a parish priest in Romagna, named Christopher, surpassed his companions by his angelic sweetness and his dove-like simplicity. He was the one who was most preferred. Though he was neither learned nor eloquent, he was the consolation of the faithful, and converted many of the heretics. The little colony prospered under this universal sympathy; in a few years it had spread over the country—we hear of convents established at Montpellier, Mirepoix, Toulouse, and Cahors. This increase of true poverty put an end to the most cherished reproach of the heretics. They could no longer accuse the Church of an excess of wealth and luxury.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The first controversies turned almost exclusively upon the Church. This is what Guillaume de Puy-Laurens says of the celebrated conference at Montréal held in 1206. The subject for discussion was left to the heretics. Arnaldus Othonis appellavit Ecclesiam Romanam non esse sanctam, neque sponsam Christi, sed Ecclesiam diaboli et doctrinam dæmoniorum, et esse illam Babylonem—"Histor. Albigens," cap. ix. We see that at this time the whole argument bore upon the moral state of the Church. We remarked this in speaking of the results of the feudal system.



controversy now turned upon dogma rather than upon morals, as it had at first. Manicheism strove to gain the mastery by means of metaphysics, and it must be opposed upon that ground. It was then that the brethren requested the help of a man better instructed than themselves, and that Francis sent Antony to them.

The situation was not without danger for him. He was but recently initiated in mystical theology, and might have felt doubtful whether he was prepared for a purely philosophical subject. But he never appears to have been more assisted by God. His contemporary biographer thus speaks of his success: "He was so well armed with decisive texts taken from the Holy Scriptures, his reasoning was so solid and convincing, that the wretched adepts of error dared not appear in his presence or open their mouths to answer him. We might say that the words of Jesus Christ to His disciples had been spoken for him: 'I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay.' He excelled in unmasking the frauds and tricks of the heretics; he knew how to circumvent their projects, and exposed their false doctrines so as to put them to shame. His equal, in the vigour with which he pursued them, was not to be found. He was everywhere called the indefatigable *Hammer of the heretics*. These manifold labours were not unrewarded; a great number of heretics returned to the truth and submitted themselves to the authority of Holy Church" ("Vita Anonyma," chap. xix.).

General history has hardly given sufficient credit to these facts. It limits itself to saying that the heresy of the Albigenses was drowned in a sea of blood. We find that it was also drowned in a flood of light. Repression did not do everything; science and the apostolate played their part, and that a considerable one. This news brought the greatest joy to Francis. He wrote at once to Antony. His letter was couched in the tenderest terms; the inscription alone is a fine eulogy: "*To Brother Antony, my Bishop.*" We see how far this man went, whom some thought to be

hostile to knowledge. It was enough that when one real sage had been found amongst his disciples, he recognised him at once as a directing power over himself and the whole Order. This is another instance of his intuitive and graceful mind, so sensible to beauty under any form, and so able to express his praise and admiration of it with the happiest inspiration.

It is certain that from this time Francis spoke of science in high terms. For example, with regard to preachers, evidently those well versed in doctrine, he said: "They are the ministers of the great King; they receive directly from the mouth of God the edicts that they bear to the people who hear them." He wished them to be regarded as the most redoubtable adversaries of the devil, and as the true brethren of Jesus Christ, those who nourish and bring up children for Him, since He has died for sinners. On the subject of doctors in theology he was still more impressive; he distinguished them as being those to whom honour and respect must be shown in a degree even greater than that given to preachers, and he gave the reason of this preference in a circular that he addressed to the whole Order: "Theologians are they who by explaining the revelation of our Lord, bring to us spirit and life." These high praises would almost seem like a beginning of exaggeration, if his well-balanced mind had not joined severe conditions to his admiration.

The first of these conditions was vocation. Francis required, in one who desired to devote himself to study, that he should have some special gift. One who was without this sort of predestination seemed to him a curiosity or a ridiculous pretender, and he showed no mercy on him. A lay brother, imagining himself called to a higher way, importunately demanded to have the book of Psalms put into his hands. Francis, doubtless judging that he was more influenced by dislike to his situation than by a real desire for progress, ordered a handful of ashes to be given to him.

The second condition was no less indispensable with him. He desired that masters and preachers should be something

more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. His extreme sense of justice revolted at the idea of a man's recommending the truth and not following it. "I wish," he said, "that my brethren should be true sons of the Gospel, and should advance in perfect simplicity while they are growing in the knowledge of the truth." These words reveal to us the hidden principle of his mind; a contradiction between a man's words and his life seemed to him a disloyal and horrible thing; he had the sentiment of Christian honour in the highest degree. Finally, knowing that knowledge puffeth up, he endeavoured to provide against such an evil in his disciples. We have one of his little homilies inspired by this solicitude. According to his custom, he took the temptation on its most insidious side for an apostle, the joy of having converted a great number of sinners. "You would do wrong to be proud," he said. "You know the words in the book of Kings: 'The barren hath borne many, and she that had many children is weakened.' I think this barren one is that brother who has not a mission for regenerating souls in the Church. But he prays with faith, and on the day of revelations there will be given to him for children all those whom his prayers have converted upon earth; the just judge will appoint them to him to contribute to his glory. On the other hand, the woman deprived of children is the self-glorifying preacher. This man thought that it was his own power that had generated so many converts to the faith. When he sees them pass over to my little brother, he will know that there was nothing in them which came from him or belongs to him." No one could have shown better how humble prayer, rather than words, unites us intimately to the power of God.

Having fixed these safeguards, Francis did not hesitate to see a gift of God in science, and, as we have said, he accorded to true Christian science the highest esteem and dignity, and yet he could not help regarding it as property of a special kind, that it was well for a Minor

to renounce, at least for a time. "Here," he said, "is a great clerk entering the Order; I should like this to be the first request he makes me: My brother, I have lived long in the world, I do not know God well. I pray you, choose me a place far removed from the noise of the world; there I will consider my past years in grief, and I will recollect my life that has hitherto been dissipated. I should grant this request. And what do you think would become of a man who began thus? I tell you he would come out of his solitude like an unchained lion. He would be ready for anything; he would continue to grow. The ministry of the word might safely be entrusted to him; all that he had collected within himself would burst forth as a fountain."

He indicated another form of this renunciation which he so much approved of, in one of the graceful parables that he was accustomed to use, and in which we see his idea illustrated. "I will suppose," he says, "a general assembly of all the religious. There are learned and unlearned ones present, educated men, and others who find ways of pleasing God without being instructed. It is decided that a learned and a simple man shall successively be called on to speak. The learned one is a true sage; he says to himself, this is not the time for a display of science; I can only be of use by speaking simply. When the time comes everyone is burning with desire to hear him. He comes forward clothed with sackcloth, his head covered with ashes, and resolved to preach only in action, he limits himself to saying: Pleasure is short, punishment is eternal; suffering passes quickly, the reward will endure for ever; there are many called, few chosen; to each one will be given according to his works. This reticence moves the hearers to tears, they feel themselves in presence of a Saint. But, when the simple man heard him, he said, in his heart, 'O God! he has taken from me what I wished to say.' What is the poor man to do? Since the learned man has acted as an ignorant one, he resolves to act as a learned one. At the next day's sitting he rises, recites a verse or two of a psalm, and trying



to comment upon it, the Spirit of God assists him so well that he surpasses all expectations. The assembly is charmed ; it exclaims, The secrets of the Most High are with the simple ! They see that spiritual gifts and virtue establish a certain degree of equality. The learned approach the ignorant, whom they see full of ardour for celestial things ; the ignorant rise to the level of the learned, who vie with them in humility. Believe me that such beauty amongst his children is a source of joy to the father of a family.”<sup>1</sup> Such was the development of the ideas of Francis on science. It is undoubted that this development originated in consequence of the preaching and instructions of Antony, and as yet Francis did not know this brother who had brought a new power into the Order. He may not even have seen him, though he was close to him at the Chapter in 1220. As time went on, he desired not to leave this world without having had the pleasure of hearing him. And God in His goodness made use of His power to grant the wish of His servant. One day when Antony, at a provincial Chapter at Arles,<sup>2</sup> was preaching with seraphic eloquence on the inscription on the cross, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, Francis was corporeally transported above the assembly. A good brother, named Monaldo, perceived him at the moment when, at the end of the sermon, he blessed the preacher and the audience. The rest did not see him, but all were filled at that moment with such extraordinary sweetness, that they had no difficulty in believing what Monaldo told them. Francis himself declared that on this occasion he had one of the greatest consolations he had ever experienced in his life.

<sup>1</sup> II. Cel., p. 254. We observe that the little discourse Francis puts in the mouth of the learned brother is the one which, according to tradition, he himself addressed to the brethren at the Chapter of Mats.

<sup>2</sup> S. Antony resided in France successively at Montpellier, Toulouse, Puy, and Bourges. He was guardian of the Convent of Limoges when Francis died. We do not think it is going too far to imagine that Brother Elias, who, according to Salimbene, made all the brethren pass from east to west (“Chronicle,” p. 405), purposely kept him away from S. Francis. The two Saints would quickly have understood one another. Brother Elias had reasons why they should not do so.

The reader is now in a position to appreciate the mistake of those who represent Francis as the enemy of science. Much nearer to the truth are the paintings of the Renaissance when, as at Orvieto<sup>1</sup> and Florence, for example, they give him a place amongst the Doctors of the Church. Francis certainly was not a Doctor in the sense of one who teaches with authority a vast collection of co-ordinate truths, and yet what we have said of him in this chapter, unless we are much mistaken, justifies the inspiration of those skilful artists. He was endowed with singular penetration, both naturally and supernaturally. When the time called for it, he had a very just sentiment of the part science fills in the development of the life of the Christian and of the Church, and he made his most cherished ideas give way before it; and finally, in loving and venerating the first man of learning who was given to him, he left in the Order a germ which was to bring forth Doctors distinguished amongst all others: at Paris, Alexander of Halès, the *irrefragable doctor*, as his contemporaries called him; Jean de la Rochelle, worthy of being better known; and above all, S. Bonaventura, who understood truth in two ways, by the mind and by the heart, and was rightly surnamed the *seraphic doctor*; at Oxford, Adam du Marais, as great in practice as he was as a thinker, who, with Bishop Grossetête, was the true founder of the celebrated university; Roger Bacon, who penetrated the secrets of nature so far as to be on the point of making the great discoveries of the future; and finally Duns Scotus, the most innovating genius of the Middle Ages, he who was called in the schools, as was Aristotle himself, the prince of thinkers and philosophers.

<sup>1</sup> At Orvieto, Luca Signorelli, in the Capella Nuova in the cathedral. He has placed S. Francis in the centre of the group entitled *Doctorum Sapiens Ordo*. At Florence, Andrea del Sarto, in the fine picture, *The Dispute on the Holy Trinity*, in the Pitti Palace. S. John Chrysostom is making the demonstration; S. Francis, with his hand upon his heart, is listening with the air of a man who understands and is interested in what is being said.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DEFINITE RULE, 1223.

AFTER the Chapter of 1222, Francis made an apostolic journey, accompanied by his vicar-general. Brother Elias wished to do the honours to his superior of the convents in Southern Tuscany which he had founded when he was minister of that province, and which Francis probably did not yet know. They first descended the valley of Umbria, and Francis once more evangelised all those little towns he loved so much, and which were so attached to him that they have been justly called his Galilee.

He had reached Terni, when he had an unexpected opportunity of proving his humility. He had been preaching to the people assembled on the great piazza. His audience had been fascinated with his words. At the end of the sermon, the Bishop, who was present, wished to express the general impression, but the compliment was badly turned. He said: "We have truly occasion to give great thanks to our Lord. In these latter years He has glorified our Church by means of this poor mean man, who is ignorant and simple. He hath not done in like manner to every nation." Every one felt that in giving praise to God, the prelate had rather done wrong to His instrument. Francis alone took what had been said literally, and was so rejoiced at it that, when he returned to the church with the clergy, he threw himself at the Bishop's feet, saying: "My Lord Bishop, I thank you for having so well given me what is my due. By attributing to God all that is worthy, and to me all that is vile, you have shown the great discernment you possess." Doubtless the Bishop at these words explained his real sentiments, and the scene ended with an embrace.

From Terni, Francis, inclining towards the left, reached the little town of Cesi, and after a short stay there proceeded to San Gemini. He knew this village; he had there, some years before, cured a demoniac in circumstances that deserve to be related. He was accompanied by three of the brethren, and had received hospitality with them in the house of a pious inhabitant of the place. Now the wife of this man was in the power of the devil, and the unfortunate husband entreated Francis to cure her. It was not easy to the Saint to grant this request. He had a horror of everything that could draw attention to himself. At last, at their continued supplications, and because it concerned the glory of God, he undertook her deliverance. Calling his brethren, he placed them at the three corners of the house, and stood himself at the fourth: "Let us beware," he said, "lest the evil spirit escape at the corners, we will stand there, forming a cross, and praying God to deliver this poor woman from the terrible yoke she is under." When the prayer was finished, he approached the unfortunate woman, who was uttering horrible cries. "Devil," he said, "I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of this woman and never again to molest her in future." Scarcely had he spoken, when the demon departed with a shrill cry. It had obeyed so promptly, and the cure was so complete, that Francis was convinced that it was not a case of possession, and that they had played him a trick. He left the town immediately, rather confused, his historian tells us. He was mistaken however, the cure was a real one. The woman was always grateful to him. As soon as she heard that her deliverer had returned, she ran out to the great piazza and begged him to give her a moment's conversation. Francis tried to avoid her, because he recognised her and still felt very uncertain about what had passed. But the woman threw herself at his feet, and gave thanks publicly to God and to His servant for the salvation he had brought her. All the witnesses of this scene attested that she had been truly possessed and delivered. Elias, who saw their faith,



joined his entreaties to theirs, and persuaded Francis to accept the hospitality they offered him.

After leaving San Gemini, Francis entered the valley of the Tiber, and stopped for some time at Prodi. This little town seems to have given the servant of God a warm welcome. We have one detail only, but it proves what a remembrance of his visit the inhabitants preserved. At the time he came they were rebuilding their communal hall. After his canonisation, to perpetuate the memory of his passage, they engraved on the façade the following lines, which are more a token of their good feeling than of their poetic talent :—

Sanctus Franciscus erat tunc in ordine priscus.  
Transivit inde, cum construebatur ibi inde.

This is nearly all that we know of this mission. It is believed, with great probability, that after visiting Orvieto and the neighbouring convents, and perhaps Chiusi, Francis regained the Portiuncula by Citta della Pieve and the valley of the Chiana.

In the month of April of the next year we find him at Bologna. He was preaching in the same place where some years before he had obtained such great success on the day of the Assumption of Our Lady. Suddenly the first shocks of an earthquake were felt. The audience, taking fright, were about to disperse. Francis stopped them, giving them the assurance that no harm would come to them. At the same time, he changed the subject of his discourse, and began to speak of these solemn warnings of the Almighty. "It is our sins," he said, "which arm the Divine Hand with the scourge and rod." And he insisted on the necessity of appeasing the anger of heaven by contrition of heart and amendment of life.

The Chapter of Pentecost brought him back to Assisi. This Chapter is justly reckoned amongst the important ones of the Order. In it Francis opened to his brethren for the first time the idea of considerably remodelling the Rule, and of afterwards submitting it to the express approbation of the Holy See. We can understand how this idea had gradually

formed itself in his mind. When in 1220 he drew up the Rule that had been in use since that time, the Order was yet in its infancy. All minds were animated by the same spirit, and though it had already considerably developed, this great body was docile in the hands of God's representative. Francis thoroughly appreciated this state of things ; it caused him to give that character of gentleness and indulgence to his work that we have noticed. The holy legislator exhorted as much as he commanded, because exhortation was as effective as commands. But those happy days of dwelling together in unity like brothers never last long, even when a Saint is at the head. Symptoms only too apparent now began to show themselves that that time was approaching its end. For instance, it was easy to see that all the brethren had not the same tender attachment to absolute poverty that the first had shown. It was to be feared that the love of authority and office had crept like a poison into the souls of some of them. This beginning of change and decay could not take Francis unawares. God had revealed it to him, and he had himself announced it to his first companions at the time he told them of the future extension of the Order. "I wish you to know," he said, "with whom you will have to live now and in future. These are the vicissitudes we shall pass through : The first fruits that come to us will be of most exquisite flavour, those which come next will be less sweet, and amongst the last there will be some that are not fit to eat, though they may still preserve some little perfume."

This time of the less sweet fruits had come, and though Francis had predicted it, he was not content to let it continue ; he sought a remedy for it, and after much reflection he could only find this : to raise the barriers higher, since the tendency was to pass under those already existing, and to place these barriers, when raised, under the vigilant authority of the Roman Church, and this was the sense of the proposition he made in one of the sittings of this Chapter.

From what goes before, we can imagine the way in which it was received. It could not be agreeable to those who

had been dreaming of relaxations rather than of an increase of strictness. Their policy consisted in gaining time and speculating on the future. What they most feared was the decisive character the new Rule would receive if it were approved at Rome. No one dared to attack the project openly, but they all showed great unwillingness to change anything that was already established. The consequence of this feeling caused much embarrassment to the holy Founder, and he was only freed from it by receiving an intimation from above. It was in this wise: In a dream he thought he was picking up very small crumbs of bread from the ground, and that he wished to distribute them to some hungry brethren who were about him. While he was fearing lest the crumbs should slip through his fingers on account of their smallness, he heard a voice from heaven saying, "Francis, make a wafer of all those crumbs and give it to eat to those who desire it." He did so, and those who did not receive their share devoutly, or despised it after they had received it, seemed to be infected with leprosy. In the morning he related all this to his companions, and said that he was grieved at not understanding the mystery. Some hours later, while he was praying, a voice said to him, "Francis, the crumbs of last night are the words of the Gospel, the wafer is the Rule, the leprosy is sin." At the same time light shone in his mind. He saw that the Rule he had written was too diffuse, that it was, as it were, absorbed in quotations from the Gospel, that it must be abridged and put into better order.

He obeyed with his habitual promptness. The Chapter was hardly ended, when he took with him two of the brethren, who are believed to have been Leo and Bonizio, and went to a hermitage on a mountain some distance off. There he fasted on bread and water, and dictated the new Rule as the Spirit of God suggested it to him in prayer. On his return to the Portiuncula, he entrusted it to Brother Elias that he might read it and take care of it. After reading it, Elias, whose head was full of plans of his own, felt convinced

that this obstacle to their fulfilment must be suppressed.<sup>1</sup> When Francis asked him for the MS. a few days afterwards, he said that he had lost it. The Saint did not utter one word of reproach, but he did not change his plans. He returned to the same solitude with his companions, and made them write the Rule a second time, almost in the same terms, as if God had dictated them to him.

The second part of the task met with fewer difficulties, thanks to the active benevolence of Cardinal Ugolino. He not only entered into the ideas of his saintly friend, but he read his work attentively, discussed it point by point with him, and even obtained some modifications which probably regarded the form more than the substance, but which entitled him later to say to the brethren that he had had a hand in compiling their Rule. These criticisms of the details were the only ones he made. The Roman Curia decided that, the principle of the Rule having been admitted after an opposition debate, there was no reason for submitting the definite expression of it to a detailed and solemn examination. On the 29th November of this year the Bull of Confirmation which Francis requested was given; it begins with these words: "*Honorius, Bishop, servant of the servants of God, to our well-beloved son Francis and the other brothers of the Order of Minors, salutation and apostolic benediction.*—The Apostolic See is wont to consent to the pious designs, and to favour the praiseworthy desires of those who address it. Wherefore, beloved sons in our Lord, with the authority of the present decree, we confirm and fortify by our apostolic authority the Rule of your Order, approved by our predecessor, Pope Innocent of blessed memory, and conceived in these terms." After having inserted the entire Rule, the Sovereign Pontiff concludes thus: "Let no one dare to infringe or contradict the contents of our present confirmation. If any one be so rash as to attempt it, let

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that in 1239, when Elias was deposed, it was said in the Order that he had never recognised this Rule: *nunquam fuerat professus regulam bullatam.* Eccleston, p. 47.



him know that he will incur the indignation of Almighty God and of His apostles, the blessed SS. Peter and Paul."

We will now place the new Rule before the reader. In reading it, let him remember that it is not a dead letter, but that, having come out of the soul and the meditations of S. Francis, this Rule has been read, meditated on, commented, and above all, practised by numbers of men whose memory is blessed ; that to this day it is an ideal of virtue and perfection for millions of our brethren, and therefore it deserves to be reckoned amongst the venerable monuments of human wisdom and energy.

## IN THE NAME OF THE LORD HERE BEGINS THE RULE AND LIFE OF THE FRIARS MINOR.

### CHAPTER I.

The Rule and Life of the Friars Minor consists in observing the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in obedience, without possessing property, and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and respect to the Lord Pope Honorius and to his successors canonically elected, and to the Roman Church. And let the other brethren be bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.

### CHAPTER II.

*Of those who desire to embrace this life, and of how they are to be received.*

If any wish to embrace this life, and come to our brethren, let them send them to their provincial ministers, to whom alone, and to none other, is accorded the power of receiving brethren. And let the ministers examine them carefully in faith and the sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these things, if they will confess them faithfully and observe them to the end, if they are unmarried, or being married, if their wives have entered a monastery, or have, with the authorisation of the diocesan Bishop, given their consent, after having made a vow of continence, and have already

reached an age at which suspicion can no longer attach to them, then let the ministers say to them the words of the holy Gospel : Let them go and sell all their goods and distribute them to the poor ; and if they cannot do this, their good will suffices. And the brethren and ministers must avoid being mixed up in their temporal affairs, that they may be able freely to do all that the Lord inspires them to do. But if they ask advice, the ministers shall have the power of referring them to men fearing God, by whose counsel they can distribute their goods to the poor. Then they shall give them the habit of probation, to wit : two tunics without hood, the cord and the breeches, and the cape reaching to the cord, at least whenever the same ministers shall not decide otherwise according to God. When the year of probation is finished they shall be received under obedience, promising to observe this life and rule. And, according to the command of the Lord Pope, no one shall in any wise be permitted to go out of this religion, because according to the holy Gospel : Whoever puts his hand to the plough and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God. Let those who have already promised obedience have a tunic with a hood, and if they wish it, another without a hood. And those who are obliged by necessity may wear shoes. All the brethren must be clothed in poor garments, and they can patch them with pieces of sackcloth and other things with the blessing of God. I advise and exhort them not to despise or judge other men whom they see clothed in fine garments, and wearing many colours, and using delicate meats and drinks, but rather let each one judge and despise himself.

### CHAPTER III.

*Of the Divine Office, of fasting, and how the brethren must go about the world.*

Clerks must say the Divine Office according to the Order of the Holy Roman Church, with the exception of the Psalter, of which they can have abridgments or breviaries.

The lay brothers must say twenty-four *Paternosters* for Matins, five for Lauds, seven for each of the hours—Prime, Tierce, Sext, and None ; twelve for Vespers, seven for Compline, and they must pray for the dead.

The brethren must fast from the feast of All Saints to the Nativity of our Lord. As to the holy fast which begins at Epiphany and lasts forty days, and was consecrated by the holy fast of our Lord, may those who observe it voluntarily be blessed of the Lord, and those who will not keep it shall not be constrained to do so, but they must fast during the other Lent, until the Resurrection of our Lord. At other times they shall not be obliged to fast, except on Fridays, and even in cases of manifest necessity the brethren shall not be constrained to corporal fasting.

I counsel, warn and exhort my brethren in the Lord Jesus Christ, when they go into the world that they avoid disputes, contentions of words, judgment of their neighbours ; that they be gentle, pacific, modest, full of mildness and humility ; that they speak honestly to all men as is fitting. And they must not ride on horseback unless they are compelled thereto by necessity or by infirmity. Into whatever house they enter they must first say, Peace be to this house. And in conformity with the holy Gospel, they are permitted to eat any food that is set before them.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### *The brethren must not receive money.*

I strictly order all the brethren not to receive money or cash in any way, either themselves, or through another. For the necessities of the sick, and for the clothing of the brethren, let the ministers and guardians alone carefully provide by means of spiritual friends, according to place, time and climate, as they shall judge it to be needful, saving always what has been said, that they shall not receive money or silver.

CHAPTER V.

*On the manner of working.*

Let those brethren to whom the Lord has given the grace of working, work faithfully and devoutly, but so that in banishing idleness they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must be subservient. And as the fruit of their labour, let them receive, for themselves and for their brethren, the things needful for the body, with the exception of money or silver, and that humbly, as befits the servants of God and the disciples of most holy Poverty.

CHAPTER VI.

*The brethren must possess nothing ; of the asking of alms,  
and concerning the sick brethren.*

The brethren must possess nothing, neither house nor land, nor anything whatsoever, that, as pilgrims and strangers in this world, they may go with confidence to ask alms. And they must not be ashamed of this, because the Lord made Himself poor for us upon this earth. This, my well-beloved brethren, is the crowning point of that highest poverty which has made you inheritors and kings in the kingdom of heaven, and has made you poor in goods but rich in virtues. Let that be your portion, for it leads to the land of the living, and if you cleave to it entirely, my dearly beloved brethren, for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will desire nothing else under heaven. In whatever place the brethren may be, let them show themselves the servants of one another, and let them freely speak of their wants to each other, for if a mother nourishes and loves her son according to the flesh, with how much more affection ought each to love and help his brother according to the spirit ! And if any fall ill, the other brethren must serve him as they would be served themselves.



## CHAPTER VII.

*Of the penance to be imposed on the brethren who have fallen into sin.*

If any brethren, at the instigation of the enemy, commit mortal sins for which it has been ordained amongst the brethren that they must have recourse to the provincial ministers, the culprit must apply to them as soon as possible, without delay. And let the ministers themselves, if they are priests, impose on him a merciful penance ; if they are not priests, let them have it imposed by priests of the Order, as it may seem to them most expedient, according to God. Moreover, they must beware lest they be angry or troubled for the sins of others, because anger and trouble impede charity in themselves and in others.

## CHAPTER VIII.

*Of the election of the minister-general of this Fraternity, and of the Chapter of Pentecost.*

The brethren are bound always to have one of the brethren of this religion for minister-general and servant of this fraternity, and are strictly bound to obey him. At his death, the election of his successor must be made by the provincial ministers and guardians at the Chapter of Pentecost, at which the provincial ministers must always assist in the place, wherever it may be, that is appointed by the minister-general, and that, once in every three years, or at longer or shorter intervals, as this same minister may appoint. And if at any time the universal body of provincial ministers and guardians judge the minister-general to be insufficient for the service and the common utility of the brethren, let this universal body to whom the election appertains be bound to elect another, in the name of the Lord. After the Chapter of Pentecost, in the same year, the ministers and guardians can, if they wish, and if it seem expedient to them, convoke the brethren once in their respective custodies to a Chapter.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Of Preachers.*

The Brethren must never preach in the Bishopric of any Bishop if he opposes it. And let no brother dare to preach in any way to the people, if the minister-general has not approved him after examination, and entrusted to him the office of preaching. I warn the same brethren, I exhort them, that in their preaching everything be chastened and chaste, and for the utility and edification of the people to whom they will announce vices and virtues punishment and glory, with brevity of words, because the Lord abridged His words upon earth.

## CHAPTER X.

*Of the admonition and correction of the brethren.*

Those brethren who are ministers and servants of the other brethren must visit and warn their brethren, and correct them with humility and charity, not commanding them anything against their souls and our rule. On the other hand, the brethren who are subject, must remember that, for God, they have renounced their own will. Wherefore, I order them strictly to obey their ministers in all those things which they have promised the Lord to observe and which are not against their souls and our rule. And wheresoever the brethren may be, if they recognise that they are not able to observe the rule spiritually, they can always, as is their duty, have recourse to their ministers. And let the ministers receive them with charity and kindness, and treat them with such familiarity as to speak and act with them as masters with their servants, for this is how it should be, since the ministers are the servants of all the brethren. I warn the brethren and exhort them in the Lord Jesus Christ, to preserve themselves from all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, the cares and solitudes of the world, from detraction and murmuring. Let not those who

are ignorant of letters care to learn them, but let them rather consider that, beyond all things, they should desire to possess the spirit of the Lord and His holy operation, to pray always to God with a pure heart, to have humility and patience under persecutions and in infirmity, and to love those who persecute, reprove and condemn us, because the Lord has said : " Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. He that shall endure unto the end, he shall be saved."

#### CHAPTER XI.

*The brethren must not enter the monasteries of female religious.*

I strictly order all the brethren to have neither intimacy nor suspicious conferences with women. Let none enter the monasteries of women, excepting those brethren who have received special permission from the Apostolic See. And they must not be godfathers either for men or women lest scandal arise on this account amongst the brethren or concerning the brethren.

#### CHAPTER XII.

*Of those who go amongst the Saracens or other infidels.*

Let those amongst the brethren who by divine inspiration desire to go amongst the Saracens and other infidels, request permission from their provincial ministers. And the ministers must grant this permission to such only as they see are fitted to be sent. Moreover, I order the ministers, by obedience, to request of the Lord Pope, one of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church as governor, protector and corrector of this fraternity, so that being always submissive and abased at the feet of this same Church, we may observe poverty and humility and the

holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised.

Such was the last religious legislation that Francis left to his sons. If we compare it with the one immediately preceding it the difference is striking, and clearly shows in what condition of mind it was written. In the first place it is shorter. The second Rule was very far from the *imperatoria brevitatis*. It was the effusion of a heart filled with God, as much as the clear and precise manifestation of a directing will. Well fitted to inspire enthusiasm, it still left room for many doubts as to what it expressly commanded. That was what Francis wished to prevent, to the great disappointment of several who were founding hopes upon this vagueness. He reduced it to the twelve chapters which we have translated. He endeavoured, as the reader will have observed, to bring out his intentions decidedly. If in future anyone transgressed the Rule, he would do so wittingly. Secondly, it is more imperative than the former one. The optative formulas, that the brethren might do this or avoid that, were almost exclusively employed in the second Rule. This fashion of commanding, a sort of middle way between a desire and an order properly so-called, had been preferred by the holy Founder as more discreet and more in conformity with Christian humility. He did not consider this sufficient in the definite Rule, and, perhaps a little reluctantly, he employed all the authority with which he was invested on those points which he had most at heart, namely, poverty, the precautions relative to chastity, and obedience. *I command with all my power, I order in the name of obedience*. He wished the law to stand out clearly before those who, in the present or the future, might be tempted to violate it. Thirdly, it is more austere, especially as regards poverty. The second Rule permitted some money to be received for the benefit of sick brethren whenever it might be necessary. It allowed also that, not money but goods in kind, of which the monastery was in urgent



need, might be obtained from the income of the novices. These two concessions are withdrawn. As he advanced in age Francis became more strongly attached to the fundamental idea which had been the light of all his life.

Francis took advantage of his visit to Rome to bring forward a project that he had long had in view. He had a great devotion to the Nativity of Our Lord. "It is the feast of feasts," he said. He was early convinced that, if this divine mystery could be represented according to nature, it would have a strong religious effect upon all Christians. One thing only had made him hesitate. Would the Church approve of such an innovation? This was the question that he now laid before the Sovereign Pontiff. An entirely favourable answer fulfilled his desire. It was now the 10th December. He lost no time. He sent a message to a nobleman at Greccio named John, a man of high birth and of the noblest mind, whom he knew to be devoted to himself. "I wish to keep Christmas night with you," he said, "and if you will agree, this is how we will celebrate it. You will choose a place in your woods, a grotto if there is one; you will put in it a manger with hay; there must be an ox and an ass; it must be as much as possible like the stable at Bethlehem. I want for once to see with my own eyes the birth and poverty of the Divine Infant." John of Greccio entered warmly into the idea of his holy friend. All was prepared as he proposed. The brethren in the neighbouring convents were informed of it, and the village populations were invited. When the time came, an immense multitude, carrying torches and lighted tapers, went to the ceremony. The wood seemed as though on fire. Celano piously remarks that a night that has illuminated the world could not remain obscure. The brethren sang carols which were taken up by the people and repeated by the echoes of the forest. Francis was at the head of the spectators close to the crib. He seemed fascinated, enraptured, and melted with tenderness, Celano says. At midnight the Mass began in the middle of the woods,

over the crib itself. The Saint wore the Levite's tunic. He sang the Gospel in a sweet, sonorous voice. His whole soul seemed to pass into the touching narrative of S. Matthew. Then he preached on the birth of that King in poverty, and on the glory of the town of Bethlehem, little amongst all towns. With loving tenderness he called the Saviour the Child of Bethlehem, and in pronouncing the name Bethlehem he drew out his voice as though to imitate the bleating of a sheep.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, when he pronounced the sweet name of Jesus, he made with his lips as though he were tasting the sweetness of the honeycomb. A holy childishness seemed to have taken possession of him while he celebrated the festival of the Holy Child. All who were present were in a sort of rapture. John of Grecio, who had prepared the festival, affirmed that at one moment he saw in the crib an infant of marvellous beauty, doubtless the Divine Infant, that He seemed to be asleep, and that Francis embraced Him as though he wished to awaken Him. This was the "delicious night," as the author of the *Dies iræ* called it. Those who assisted at it seemed to be taking their part in the triumph of simplicity, poverty, and humility. They returned home with hearts filled with joy, and preserved ever after an unfading memory of all they had beheld. Five years afterwards, when Francis was canonised, they wished to erect a chapel to the honour of the new Saint on the spot where he had celebrated this triumphal feast with them.

Francis remained at Grecio. We have said that he liked the monastery in this town, because he found it richer in poverty than many others. At first he shut himself up in

<sup>1</sup> At that time there was in the Church a marvellous dramatic genius, full of boldness and familiarity. The mother allowed much liberty to her children. The *mysteries* were celebrated in the cathedrals. Other realistic feasts of a very different kind were celebrated—those of the ass, of the fools, &c. This took place principally on the anniversaries of the childhood of our Lord, the Circumcision, the Magi, the Holy Innocents, and on the days when humanity, saved from the devil, was intoxicated with joy—Christmas and Easter. The clergy themselves took part in them (Michelet, "Hist. de France," tom. ii. p. 656). Beside these coarse rejoicings the grotto at Grecio and the bleating of S. Francis seem spiritual and refined.

solitude and contemplation, as he was accustomed to do after business that had absorbed him. Then he came out from time to time to go and preach in the neighbouring valley of Rieti, where his memory has been kept alive vividly. He preached frequently in the parish church of Grecio. He was strongly attached to this people, whom he had formerly delivered from such great scourges, and he desired to keep them steadfast in the accomplishment of the engagements they had undertaken with God. The good people, on their part, regarded him as their benefactor, and did not know how to show him enough gratitude. They came and offered him all that they had of rarest and best. One day a man brought him a leveret that he had taken alive with a snare. Francis was touched with compassion when he saw the little animal. "My brother hare," he said, "come to me. How didst thou let thyself be thus taken?" And the leveret, as soon as it was put on the ground, ran to the Saint as to a safe hiding-place, and crept into his bosom. Francis covered it with caresses. He spoke to it with his gentle voice, and told it never to let itself be caught again. Then he put it down that it might go back to the woods. But the leveret, instead of running away, came back again and again to him. To separate it from him, Francis was obliged to have it carried out a long way into the country. Another time a fisherman brought him a beautiful water-fowl, as he was returning to the convent by the lake of Rieti. The bird, in spite of its natural wildness, showed itself as tame as the leveret. It remained perched on the hand of Francis for an hour, while he was praying, and it would only take flight when the Saint, having finished his intercourse with God, took leave of it saying: "Go and praise the Lord."

These innocent joys were shortened by a revelation which opened a new field to the zeal of the servant of God. One day he came suddenly out of his cell and said to the brethren: "They of Perugia have done evil to their neighbours, their hearts are puffed up with success, they are

going to be humbled, the Lord has already taken the sword in His hand." By his tone and his emotion the brethren knew that he had received a communication from above. In fact, he remained absorbed, as though filled with one engrossing thought, and at the end of some days, urged by the Spirit of God, he took a companion and set out for Perugia. After the example of our Saviour, who sought to avert the evils that were about to fall upon Jerusalem, he wished to bring the rival of Assisi to repentance, that God might turn away His anger and vengeance. He had begun to preach to the people in this spirit, when the nobles came out on horseback to begin an assault of arms. The noise they made soon drowned the voice of the orator. Then Francis despaired of his attempt. "O terrible blindness," he cried, "these men know not either how to fear or to prevent the judgments of God." And, turning towards the nobles, he said: "Hear what God will have you to know by His little servant. The Lord has exalted you over all this country, therefore you ought to be more gentle and more grateful to God than others. But you are ungrateful to the divine grace; you attack your neighbours with arms in your hands; you spread devastation and death amongst them. I give you my word, this cruelty will not go unpunished. You will be abased, and, what will increase your punishment, you will be abased by attacking and slaughtering one another. Since the goodness of God has taught you nothing, you must be taught in the school of His indignation and vengeance." A few days only elapsed before the prophecy was fulfilled. A social question arose; the whole town took up arms; the people rose against the nobles; the nobles attacked the people; the struggle was so fierce and the carnage such that their neighbours, though they did not love them, were struck with compassion for them.

Francis had returned to Assisi before these bloody events took place. The Chapter of Pentecost was approaching. He was preparing for it when Clara imposed on him an unexpected task. The holy abbess had read with un-



reserved admiration the Rule which had been approved at Rome. Unlike those who were inclined to think it impracticable, she thought that with some slight alterations it might be imposed on the second Order as well as on the first. And it was this Rule, suitably modified, that she requested of Francis in her own name and that of her companions.

Once, in 1217, Francis had refused to write a Rule for the sisters. He had sent Clara to Cardinal Ugolino, who, in his opinion, was her true superior. He had granted the request, and we still have his work. But we see that in composing it, the eminent prelate had borrowed more from the traditions of S. Benedict than from the Rule that was in force at the Portiuncula. For instance, he had established the strictest poverty for individuals, but he authorised collective property. On the other hand, he prescribed austerities of which Francis had never thought; fasting every day, perpetual silence, sleeping on boards, &c. The sisters had accepted what so high an authority had imposed on them, but none the less they felt that the instructions Francis had given them at first had been quite different. The result was unsatisfactory, and as time went on their situation became trying.

Francis took notice of their suffering. He could not again refuse the prayer they made him. After the approbation of the Sovereign Pontiff, he considered the legislation he had brought back from Rome more as a form of life recommended by the Church than as his own work. He had several conferences with Cardinal Ugolino. He confided to him that his idea had always been that the brethren and sisters should live the same life. He asked him if he would object to make the change that Clara desired. The Cardinal unhesitatingly gave up his peculiar ideas. They set to work together, and arranged the definite Rule. Excepting the necessary modifications, it is the same as that of the Friars Minor. At the most, here and there we can detect a shade of more marked tenderness and respect.

For the first time, the general Chapter was not held at Assisi. Francis had chosen, as the place of reunion, a little convent situated on the territory of Gubbio, near the Benedictine abbey of S. Verecundus. Three hundred brethren assembled. Excepting a small number of old members of the Order, they were all provincial ministers or guardians. Besides the ordinary work, they were chiefly occupied about the promulgation of the Rule. Francis explained to the brethren how he had been led to seek out a fresh arrangement of it, and how he had found the way of accomplishing it in solitude and prayer. "I have put nothing of my own into it," he said, "I have written it as it was revealed to me." Then he spoke to them of his journey to Rome, told them of his favourable reception by the Sovereign Pontiff, and dilated upon the authority that the approbation of the Holy See conferred upon the Rule. "It must be for us more than ever," he said, "the book of life, the hope of salvation, the marrow of the Gospel, the covenant of the new alliance." Consequently, he ordained that each of the brethren should have a copy of it, and that they should carry this copy about with them always, that it might constantly be before their eyes; if possible, they should have it in their hands when they died. He ordered also that they should learn it by heart and repeat it often to themselves, both to console them in trouble and to remind them of the vow they had taken to be faithful to it.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE STIGMATA, 1224.

THE French arrive, the Spaniards come, the Germans and English are hurrying in. . . . This was how Francis had announced beforehand the successive developments of his Order. In effect, the French, Spaniards and Germans had come, but up to this period the English nation had not yet entered the family. Francis thought it was now time to call them. He was in constant communication with the brethren who had founded the Order in France. He treated them with a sort of favour, perhaps because they held the place he had wished to occupy. He believed in their virtue, and he wrote to them with his own hand. One day he ordered that on receipt of his letter they should sing together a hymn of praise in honour of the Holy Trinity : *Benedicamus Patrem et Filium cum Spiritu Sancto*. It was these beloved brethren whom he chose for the mission to England. He ordered the guardian of the convent in Paris to take with him the brethren whom he considered adapted to the work, and to go to England and establish houses there. Brother Angelo, notwithstanding his youth, was gifted with singular prudence. He chose his auxiliaries so well that they all answered perfectly to the requirements made of them. They were eight in number. Three of them were Englishmen affiliated to the Order on the Continent : Richard Ingwerth, a priest and preacher ; William Esseby, clerk, and a novice in the Order ; and Richard of Dover, an acolyte. The five others were laymen : four Italians, Henry of Treviso, William of Florence, Migliorato, Giacomo ; and a Frenchman, Laurence of Beauvais.

The little company went to Fécamp to embark. They

were received by the Benedictines, who were always generous to the new Order, and who now paid their passage when they departed. The English chronicle relates their arrival in England in these terms: "In the year of the Lord 1224, the eighth of the reign of King Henry, son of John, on the Tuesday after the Nativity of Our Lady which in this year fell on a Sunday, the Friars Minor for the first time landed in England, near Dover." From Dover the missionaries went straight to Canterbury. There they divided. Five remained in Canterbury, and after founding the convent in that town, they successively founded those of Cambridge, Lincoln, and Shrewsbury. The four others went to London, where they received hospitality from the Preaching Friars. A few weeks later, thanks to the liberality of a gentleman named John Travers, they had a convent to themselves. On the eve of All Saints, two of them settled in Oxford, and cast into the ground the grain of mustard seed which soon became the most beautiful of trees. A few months later they founded another house at Northampton. England everywhere welcomed the sons of S. Francis with the old enthusiasm which in early times had made her the island of monasteries and Saints. In 1256, thirty-two years after the arrival of Angelo of Pisa, the English province numbered forty-nine convents and twelve hundred and forty-two brethren.

But what was worth more than numbers, the brethren brought with them strength of character. Nowhere, perhaps, was the spirit of S. Francis more fully received.<sup>1</sup> The Franciscan chronicler enumerates with just pride the virtues that distinguished these early times. They were: First, Poverty: this was carried to the furthest limits. The missionaries established themselves in the most populous quarters. The walls of their houses were often made of stucco, and they lacked the most necessary things. At Cambridge, their chapel was so small that a carpenter was able to construct it in one day.

<sup>1</sup> The minister-general, John of Parma, when visiting the brethren in England, often exclaimed: "Would that this province were in the centre of the world! It would be the model for all the churches."—Eccleston, p. 68.



When they presented their first novice, a fine young man named Solomon, for Holy Orders, they presented him in the name and to the title of poverty. "Let Brother Solomon of the Order of the Apostles approach to be ordained," said the prelate. After the ceremony, the newly ordained ate at the Archbishop's table with the one who had presented him, then they both returned to Canterbury bare-footed in deep snow. Those who saw them shuddered, says the chronicle (Eccleston, p. 111). Secondly, Piety : they gave themselves to prayer with all their hearts. One of them was almost constantly in the chapel. On the vigils of the great feasts, they sang matins and lauds through a great part of the night. If there were but three or four of them, as often happened at the beginning, they sang the whole Office with the same solemnity. Once, on the feast of S. Laurence at the convent in Cambridge, there were only three, and one of these, a novice, was so infirm that he had to be carried into the choir, but they sang the Mass with such earnestness and pious emotion that the tears were seen to flow down the cheeks of the poor novice. Thirdly, Happiness : happiness of the English kind, arising from a good foundation, and gradually expanding within the soul till it becomes irresistible like that of children. With several it overflowed to such an extent that they could hardly help laughing when they met each other or were in company together.<sup>1</sup> This went so far at Oxford that they had to give the discipline to one of the brothers every time that he laughed in chapel or in the refectory. One day he received eleven disciplines for this

<sup>1</sup> Such irrepressible joy is not uncommon at the origin of monastic foundations. It was even to be found at Port Royal, where perhaps no one would have expected to meet with it. "The abundance of grace with which God was pleased to endow me," says Lancelot in his memoirs, "and the peace with which He filled me was so great that I could hardly keep myself from laughing on all occasions. I knew not to what this change was due. I accused myself of frivolity and often confessed it, but M. de Saint-Cyran saw that there was another reason for it, and he told me not to be surprised ; that sometimes the soul, in reflecting on how and whence it had come, on where it was, and on all that had taken place within it, was so transported with joy that it could not restrain itself." This might have consoled the good English Minors.

fault and still he was not cured, for he laughed a twelfth time. Fortunately he found a remedy for himself. His conscience began to reprove him. One night he dreamt that he saw all the brethren assembled in chapel. As usual, they began to laugh, when the crucifix that was above the choir turned towards them as though it had been alive, and said severely : "None but the sons of Corah laugh while the Office is being sung." At the same time it seemed as if it tried to detach itself from the cross to leave the chapel ; it had nearly succeeded, but the guardian perceived it, and mounting on a stool, tightened the nails with a hammer. When this dream was related to the brethren they became graver, and after this they only smiled, says the chronicle. Fourthly, Charity: they had the greatest tenderness of heart towards one another. Their greatest, or rather their only affliction, was to be separated. When this misfortune came to them, those who were to remain behind accompanied those who were leaving, to great distances. They stopped in some secluded place and embraced each other weeping, thus showing that they had but one heart and one soul.

To these virtues we must add a marked taste for science. The English Minors had not a moment's hesitation on this point. They at once regarded it as a source of elevation to the soul, and as a powerful means of action in an Order dedicated to the apostleship. As yet they had no masters of their own, but they longed for the time when they should have them. The first whom they enrolled in their Order was Adam of Oxford, who, according to the chronicler, was famous throughout the universe. He had made a vow to grant any thing that should be asked him in the name of the Blessed Virgin. A Minor who had a great admiration for him, the venerable William of Colville, meeting him one day, said : "Dear master, for the love of the Mother of God, enter our Order, come and ennoble our simplicity."<sup>1</sup> Adam did not hesitate, he did what was requested of him, as if the invitation had come from the Holy Virgin herself. His

<sup>1</sup> This anecdote has been attributed to Alexander of Hales.

vocation brought with it that of one of his friends, Adam of Marisco, or du Marais. These two excellent masters had begun to instruct the novices, when Adam of Oxford aspired to a still higher life. He believed himself called to leave his books and go at the risk of his life to carry the Gospel to the infidels. His friend, seeing him pass from one virtue to another, had a presentiment of this vocation. In his sleep he thought that they were walking together in the country, and that they came to a castle, and on entering the court they saw a painted crucifix. They could not pass till they had kissed this crucifix. Adam of Oxford kissed it first and entered, then Adam du Marais kissed it and followed his friend. But the latter had already begun to ascend a staircase so rapidly, that du Marais, who had lost sight of him, cried out: "Go slower, go slower." The vision was soon realised. Adam left the convent, went and threw himself at the feet of Gregory IX., and with his consent started to evangelise the Saracens. He died at Barletta on his way, but God had seen his generosity, and He honoured the tomb of His servant with miracles.

Adam du Marais was now left to work alone, and he first withdrew himself into the solitude of the convent at Worcester. Then he came to Oxford, where he had been brought up, and took the degree of Doctor. There he inaugurated a method of instruction that revealed the great breadth of his mind. His contemporaries have given him the title of the *Illustrious Doctor*. Many of them in their writings mention him in terms of high admiration. Roger Bacon calls him an accomplished sage, and one of the greatest ecclesiastics in the world. This double eulogy was well deserved. Adam was a man of the schools, a solid philosopher, a profound metaphysician, as learned as any man could be. At the same time he had the penetration of a statesman, was quick to notice events and to discern their requirements. With Bishop Grossetête and Count Simon de Montfort he was one of the counsellors in the troubled reign of Henry III. The Sovereign Pontiff entrusted him with several delicate affairs, amongst

others, with the preaching of the crusade and the preparation of the Council of Lyons. Numbers of Bishops sought his advice. He would have been entirely lost to study had he not solicited and obtained an apostolic brief forbidding any prelate or prince to compel him to work with him. In the midst of these varied occupations Adam remained pious, modest, sensible to the merit of others, and very charitable to the small and the poor. It is needless to say that in the school of such a master the novices of the convent at Oxford grew in virtue as well as in science. The chronicle describes them as full of innocence, enthusiastic for poverty, and so eager to learn that they went every day barefooted to the schools, whatever might be the distance, the sharpness of the cold, or the thickness of the mud.

As soon as he had prepared this vigorous offshoot to his Order, Francis returned to his beloved Umbrian valley. He had been for some days preaching near Foligno, in company with his vicar-general, when he was warned that he had but a short time to live. During the night a venerable old man, clothed in white, having the aspect of a priest, appeared to Brother Elias. "Rise, my brother," he said, "and announce to Brother Francis that eighteen years have passed since he renounced the world and gave himself to the Lord; he has but two more years to remain upon earth, after that God will call him to Himself." Francis was moved at this solemn communication. He did not fear death, since death to him was gain, but he felt that God had some hidden design in warning him thus beforehand. He returned to Assisi, resolved to retire to some solitary place where, while offering to God the entire acquiescence of his will, he might shake off the dust that he had contracted in his intercourse with men.

After reflection, he chose La Vernia, where he had formerly had such edification, and which he had not seen for several years. Tradition attributed the rifts in this mountain to the effect of the earthquake that took place at the death of Jesus Christ. God inspired His servant, whom He was going to



lead into the sufferings of Calvary, to go to this place that had been formed by the events that took place at Calvary itself. Francis took with him the four brethren whom he most loved, those on whom he rested as a building rests upon four columns. "I do not name them," says Celano, "to save their modesty, for all are modest, as spiritual men should be." But, at the same time, the historian describes them so well by their special characteristics, that the Order has had no difficulty in recognising them. They were Brothers Masseo, Rufinus, Angelo Tancredi, and Leo, all four "men of virtue devoted to God, dear to the Saints, gracious to men." Their business was to watch over their master, to provide for his wants, and, above all, to protect his retirement and silence from the invasion of importunate strangers. The little troop set out towards the end of July, and reached the summit of the mountain without encountering any great difficulties.

They celebrated the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady with the brethren at the convent, and then Francis began his usual fast in honour of the Holy Angels, and retired into solitude. He spent the first days in almost continual prayer. In this long period of contemplation his mind became absorbed in God, and his whole soul was filled with unutterable sweetness and grace. Never before had he been in such close intimacy with God, and he profited by these favours of the Almighty to endeavour to penetrate more closely into the mysteries of his Divine Friend. "Not," says S. Bonaventura, "as a gazer on the ineffable Majesty who would deserve to be overwhelmed with its glory, but as a faithful and prudent servant, seeking to know the will of God to which he ardently desired to conform himself entirely. He entreated God to show him the way in which He desired him to walk for the remainder of his life. The answer was less prompt and less explicit than he might have expected. All that he understood was that great sufferings were in store for him. Immediately he offered himself up to this intention. He declared himself entirely submissive

and ready to endure any anguish of mind or any bodily torture ; one thing only he asked, that the Divine Will might be manifested to him.

Finding that this manifestation delayed its coming, he made use of the liberty of the children of God, and employed a method that had served him before at the beginning of his vocation for obtaining an answer from his heavenly Father. He knew that Saints and holy men, moved by the desire of a more intimate life with God, had sometimes sought for what would please Him by opening a book at hazard, and he resolved, in all simplicity, to have recourse to this plan once more. The convent chapel was close by. He went into it and knelt before the altar, and after praying the good God, the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation, to vouchsafe to speak to him, he rose, took the book of the Gospel, placed it respectfully on the altar, and having made the sign of the cross, opened it trembling. He came upon the Passion of Our Lord. He was afraid it was only by chance, and he opened the book a second and a third time, and always came upon the story of the sufferings of the Saviour. Then he was filled with the Spirit of God. He understood that he must enter the kingdom of heaven through many tribulations, much anguish, and many conflicts. The brave soldier had not a moment's trouble. Accustomed never to give way to himself, he was not afraid of giving way before the attacks of the enemy. He was full of joy, and began singing a hymn of praise. He was to have his Passion, he was to be a martyr, as he had so much desired to be !

No doubt that Francis associated his friends in his prayer, his anxieties, and his joy. S. Bonaventura says that one of them was with him in the chapel when he opened the book of the Gospel. According to tradition it was Brother Leo who, as the Saint's confessor, assisted him the most closely in all this affair, and who seems to have been much impressed by all that he was permitted to witness. We know not how far he understood the mind of his holy superior. All that we learn is that finally a great tempest arose within him,

probably on this occasion. Such trouble of mind took hold of him that he knew not how to escape from it. Francis seemed to be too much absorbed in God for him to venture to call his attention to himself. He thought he would content himself by trying to get some pious sentence written by his hand, feeling sure that would be sufficient to bring back peace to his soul. Francis did not wait to be asked. Always attentive to others, even in the midst of his interior life, he said one day to Brother Leo, "I wish to write down a word of God that I have just been meditating upon in my heart. Bring me some paper and ink." The brother hastened to obey. After writing some words to the honour of God, and setting down the reflections that he desired to commit to paper, Francis wrote the following benediction, on which he inscribed a **T** as a kind of flourish :—"The Lord bless thee and keep thee ; may He show His face to thee, and have pity on thee ; may He turn His countenance towards thee and give thee peace **T**. The Lord bless thee, Brother Leo." "Take this leaf," he said, "and keep it till thy death." Brother Leo had no sooner received it than the temptation vanished.

But the joy with which Francis had received the first communications from above was shortly to receive its complement in those that succeeded. About the time of the festival of the Exaltation of the Cross, or, according to some traditions, on the day of the feast itself, he went out early in the morning to pray, at some distance from the convent, on the side of the mountain. He began to meditate upon the Passion. As he knelt, overwhelmed in compassion for the Divine Victim, he forgot everything around him, human beings, and his very self. He seemed absorbed into Him who sacrificed Himself for us. Suddenly, out of the sky above him, he saw descend a seraph having six wings, blazing with fire and light. Of the six wings two were raised above his head, two were stretched out to fly with, and the other two covered his body. The celestial spirit approached swiftly and placed himself in the air close to

Francis ; then, between the wings, he perceived the figure of a man, having his feet and hands attached to a cross, and of marvellous beauty. At this appearance Francis was seized with a kind of stupor, and his body trembled all over. He knew that it was Jesus on whom he was gazing, and his heart was divided between joy and sadness. With joy, on account of the gentle look with which his Lord regarded him ; with sadness, because the sight of the instrument of torture and ignominy pierced his soul with grief. Under this double impression he stood up on his feet. He tried to think what could be the significance of this union of the infirmity of the Passion with the immortality of the seraphic spirit. He who was thus appearing to him externally did not refuse him an internal explanation. He gave him to understand that he had before his eyes an image of what was going to happen to himself. His martyrdom would be a spiritual one ; he would bear in his body the living representation of the torture of the cross, and in his heart he would have the fiery love of the seraphim. Francis bowed before his Saviour, who added some words that the Saint always refused to reveal, and then the divine vision vanished.

The realisation of what had been announced to him was not long in coming. Hardly had the Saviour departed when the Saint's whole being seemed to expand. New and brilliant light shone upon his soul, an impulse beyond what he had ever before experienced drew him towards God, and he found in Him such peace and satisfaction as belong to angels rather than to men. At the same time the marks of the crucifixion began to show themselves in his members. His right side was marked with a red scar, as though it had been opened by a lance, and by-and-by the sacred blood often flowed from it, wetting his tunic and garments. His feet and hands were pierced with nails like those he had seen in the image of the Redeemer. They were formed of a mass of nerves that was loose, and could be moved in the wound. Their round black heads showed within the hands and above the feet. Their long points, bent and as it were beaten with a



hammer, appeared on the other side and projected from the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

Elevated thus in soul to the seraphic life, and transformed in body to Christ crucified, the servant of God remained for a long time motionless in the same place. With difficulty he came back to himself. He passed over in his mind all that he had seen, heard, and felt. At last he thought of his brethren. His first impulse was to tell them nothing of the secret of the Lord, then he reflected that it would be very difficult to keep the glorious wounds hidden from his intimate companions. Not knowing what to do, he carefully covered his hands and his feet before calling them. Then he spoke to them in vague and general terms of his experiences. A brother named Illuminato (and he was truly illuminated by grace), the same who had accompanied Francis to the East, saw at once that something extraordinary had happened. "My brother," he said, "know that often it is not for yourself alone, but for others also, that the mysteries of heaven are revealed to you, and there is danger that in keeping silence on what you have received for the benefit of many, you may have to give account to God for the hidden talent." At these words the Saint overcame his unwillingness, and, with much fear, related to his friends the celestial apparition, adding that He who had appeared to him had told him things which he never could reveal to anyone as long as he lived. We must believe, says S. Bonaventura, that the discourse of the seraph had been so divine that it was not permitted to man to translate it into human language.<sup>2</sup>

When he had fulfilled his intention and passed forty days in solitude, on the day after the feast of S. Michael the Archangel, Francis came down from the mountain, carrying with him the image of the Crucified, not cut in marble or

<sup>1</sup> We see that to have a true idea of the miracle we cannot go entirely by the artists. The rays, which they make passing from the seraph to Francis, and apparently creating the stigmata by their action, did not exist in reality.

<sup>2</sup> "S. Bon.," p. 389. In spite of S. Bonaventura's assertion, written more than forty years after S. Francis' death, later writers have affirmed that he revealed the secret of the mysterious words.

wood by the hand of an artist, but engraved in his flesh by the hand of the living God. And knowing that it is well to keep the secret of the King, he hid those sacred prints as much as possible. But God for His own glory reveals the great things He has worked. At first the Saint's precautions were successful. He wore large shoes and kept his hands covered. If anyone wished to kiss them he only presented the tips of his fingers, and if he washed them in presence of witnesses it was only his fingers that he put into the water. But at last, finding that wounds of this kind could not be entirely hidden from the brethren around him, he allowed them to see them, but on condition that they should never look long upon them. It always gave him pain if they became the objects of vulgar curiosity. One day a brother from Brescia, who had come to visit him at Siena, was very anxious not to return to his convent without having seen the wounds. He applied to Brother Pacificus, who entered into his desire and said : " At your departure, I will ask for his hand to kiss, and when he gives it me I will make a sign, and you will be able to see the sacred nail." All happened as he had planned. When the brother was about to leave, he and Pacificus knelt at the feet of Francis, and Pacificus said : " Bless us, O beloved brother, and give me your hand that I may kiss it." Francis gave his hand, though unwillingly ; Pacificus kissed it, and in doing so showed it to the other. Francis, who had suspected some fraud, called back Pacificus when the other was gone. " God forgive you, my brother," he said ; " you sometimes give me much trouble." " How is that, O sweetest mother ?" replied Pacificus tenderly, prostrating himself before him. But Francis did not add another word. He did not wish to speak of what he would rather have kept hidden.

Nor did he like others to speak to him of it. Some brethren who attempted to do so were sharply repulsed. " What is that," said a brother, who perceived the stigmata on his hands and feet. " Mind your own business," replied Francis. " What is that blood that I have found on your tunic ?" said another, who had been beating the dust out of

the tunic. "You would only be justified in asking me such a question," answered Francis, "if you did not know that it is a hidden thing," and he put his hand over his eyes. As to the wound in his side, only one brother saw it during his life, and that was by chance. "Will you let us shake the dust off your tunic?" he said to Francis; and the Saint replied, "God bless you for your attention; it does need it." While Francis was taking off the tunic, the brother kept his eyes on him, and he distinctly saw the sacred wound. Another brother touched it without seeing it. That was Rufinus. He was one day rubbing the Saint's shoulders with oil to relieve his sufferings, his hand slipped and touched the wound. "God forgive you," exclaimed Francis, who felt a sharp pain; and after that day he always wore a garment under his tunic, made so as to cover the place. At his death only all the coverings were withdrawn; more than seven hundred people, as we shall mention in its place, were admitted to contemplate the mystery that had till then been so carefully concealed.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Karl Hase, in his "*S. Francis of Assisi*," has devoted a whole chapter to a discussion on the miracle of the stigmata. Renan says that this is perhaps the most interesting part of the work. Though Hase has often written in suitable terms about S. Francis, on this occasion he has failed entirely. His argument has been faithfully copied by Renan. It is this: The remarkable thing about the miracle is that it is guaranteed by contemporary witnesses. On the day of the Saint's death the stigmata were talked of: had they been talked of before? Our narrative shows that they had. The fact was known to the brethren, their curiosity had been excited about it, they were anxious to see the sacred wounds. Renan assumes, without foundation, that they had not spoken of them. If that were the case, what would this silence prove? How can it affect the circumstantial testimony of Celano, of the Three Companions, of S. Bonaventura? Renan thinks that it is sufficient to upset the miracle. Since no one had mentioned it, he says, we are forced to the conclusion that Brother Elias invented the whole thing, or himself impressed the sacred marks on the body. What a conclusion! We will pass over all that is gratuitous and improbable in it to a historian, and still we see that it explains nothing. What becomes of all the details of the fact, details as well established as the fact itself? Where is La Vernia, the seraph, the Saint's companions? We have to make out that the first historians, were the dupes of Brother Elias, whom they did not like. Dupe however, would be too mild a term, for they could not have been so completely deceived; we must call them accomplices. Let M. Renan consider them impostors if he pleases. For my part I have lived too much with them not to have assured myself of their sincerity.

Such in all its details was the fact hitherto unheard of, of the stigmata of S. Francis. Not only the historians of the Saint have related it with the precision of ocular witnesses, but their impressions of its importance were so profound that they tried to explain its cause and describe its effects. We will continue to report their words. They begin by remarking that there was here a divine work, worthy of great meditation. "It is a great sacrament," they say, "a venerable mystery, whose meaning is known to God only, and has been but partially revealed to men." Again they say, "the stigmata are the seal of the High Priest Jesus Christ impressed upon one of His servants. It is a prerogative in which God's tenderness towards His creature appears in terrible majesty." Such was the impression of all who had the good fortune of seeing the Saint who bore the stigmata. At the general Chapter of Genoa, more than thirty years after the event, one of the companions of Francis, on being requested by the general, John of Parma, to tell the truth on the subject of the stigmata, advanced into the midst of the assembly and cried: "These sinful eyes have seen them, these sinful hands have touched them." And the good brother wept as he spoke.

This wonderful privilege was accorded to Francis because of his great love to Jesus Christ. Celano says, "he loved Him with a marvellous love. Oh, what interior intercourse he had with Him! How His soul was nourished by Him! How he spoke of Him! They know it who lived with him. Jesus was everything to him. How often at table he has forgotten to eat or drink. If anyone spoke of Jesus, if he spoke of Him himself, immediately he was lost. One might say or do what one pleased, he saw nothing, he heard nothing. How often on a journey he followed his meditations more than the road, singing of Jesus and inviting all the elements to sing of Jesus with him! This is why, in preference to all others, he was gloriously marked with the seal of Jesus." He loved Jesus more than the rest, and Jesus loved him in return. This mutual love sought union



in resemblance. The love of Francis by itself would have been powerless to operate this resemblance ; the still stronger love of Jesus did what his could not, it transformed Francis into His image.

And it was a transformation into the cross, because the cross is the great mystery of Christ, and the cross was the great attraction that Francis had always felt. It had been associated with the commencement of his religious life. He saw a cross upon the shields that hung in the palace of his spouse. Jesus had appeared to him on the cross to reveal to him the sufferings of His Passion. A crucifix had been animated before him in order that he might know his vocation. Later, during his active life, the cross seemed to be reflected from his person. Brother Sylvester saw an immense cross supported by him ; Brother Pacificus saw two luminous swords transfixing him in the form of a cross ; Brother Monaldo saw him floating with his arms extended like a cross, above the audience that was listening to S. Antony. These manifestations were only essays, S. Bonaventura tells us. God was conducting His servant as though by degrees to the supreme assimilation to His Crucified Son, which was realised on La Vernia. The cross had occupied a still greater place in the internal life of Francis. He knew that it has been the salvation of the world, and to it he looked for the fulfilment of all his hopes, and in it he found his glory. But while he tasted of the gift, he never forgot at what price it had been acquired for us. The Divine Victim inspired in him the liveliest compassion. His abandonment, His agony, His wounds, His death, transpierced him with grief. This grief and loving pity were so great that he wept and cried aloud under its influence, as we have seen. Yet that did not satisfy his heart. He longed to have part in that great sacrifice, and to mingle his blood with the Holy Blood that has been shed for us. Hence his many labours, his many painful efforts. He persevered in the cross ; he was always in the cross.<sup>1</sup> Francis, like the

<sup>1</sup> "I. Cel.," p. 97.

Apostle, was crucified with Christ. The stigmata of the Saviour had penetrated his soul and were deeply rooted there, his historians say. And this, they add, is the reason why he bore the stigmata. God wished to show outwardly what existed inwardly, and He wished to recompense and glorify the sincerest friend whom, after S. Paul, His Crucified Son has perhaps ever had upon earth.

According to the same historians, the stigmata were not only a recompense ; they were also a benefit and a source of progress. While God marked him outwardly, He set him on fire within, S. Bonaventura says. He who already loved so well was by this means rendered capable of loving still more. From the limitations of human nature he passed spiritually into the sublime state of the seraphim, and became a sharer in the burning ardour and in the ineffable tenderness of those spirits, the highest in the celestial hierarchy. To this end the Author of every gift lavished upon him all the treasures of life and grace that were necessary. This being so, we can understand that the Sovereign Pontiffs have warmly attested the truth of so singular an event. We can understand how the Church has instituted a feast to perpetuate and honour the memory of it. But at the same time no one can feel himself capable of exactly explaining its nature. "We cannot fathom the unfathomable," says Celano. "This mystery was shown in the flesh, because it could not be explained in words. Let our silence only speak then, since words are powerless."

One explanation has, however, been attempted, and many, not without foundation, have thought that it could only have been attempted as the result of conversations with Francis himself. It is a solemn and ardent poem, in which the occurrence at La Vernia is related in the inspired measures of an ode. The author, whoever he may have been, spoke in the Saint's name as if he were his interpreter. He has well represented the tumultuous agitation of a soul stirred to its depths and overcome by a vision beyond its strength. The following lines give some idea of the subject of the poem :—

"Love has cast me in a fire, he, my new spouse, what time the loving Lamb gave me the ring: he threw me into prison then, and with a knife he wounded me. My heart he cut in two; love has cast me in a fire.

"He cut my heart in two, and my body fell to earth; the bolt from Love's cross-bow struck me with fire. He made war of peace. I die of sweetness! love has cast me in a fire.

"Marvel not that I die of sweetness, such blows he gave me with lances of love: for the blade is long and broad, one hundred cubits, you must know; it pierced me through and through. Love has cast me in a fire.

"Then the lances were thick and the bolts flew fast. Then did I take a shield and still the blows came thicker, they broke me down and no defence I had, he sent them with such force. Love has cast me in a fire.

"He sent them with such force that I despaired of warding them, so to escape from death I cried with all my strength: the war thou wagest is unequal; but he set up a new machine that gave me other blows. Love has cast me in a fire.

"Its missiles were such heavy stones that each one weighed a thousand pounds: they fell so thick and fast I could not count them, not one but hit the mark. Love has cast me in a fire.

"He never could have missed me, so well he aimed. Prone on the ground I lay, nor could I help myself. All broken as I was, like a dead man no consciousness I had. Love has cast me in a fire.

"Translated, not by death but by excess of joy, my heart within became so strong that I revived and followed those escorts who led me to the supernal court. Love has cast me in a fire.

"Then, when my strength returned, I made war on Christ. Soon I was armed, and rode upon his land. I met him and encountered him, and took revenge on him. Love has cast me in a fire.

"Then after my revenge, I made my peace with him,

because his love had been the first, the veritable love. Now am I of Christ enamoured wholly, of him whom I have ever borne within my heart. Love has cast me in a fire.

“Love has cast me in a fire.”<sup>1</sup>

After all that goes before, we can understand those expressions so common in the Franciscan history: *the seraphic man, the seraphic Order, the seraphic town or province*. The seraphic man is Francis, who was miraculously uplifted into the state of which we have spoken. The seraphic Order is the Order which he established, and which seems to have had granted to it a special facility for the love of Jesus Christ, as if by participation in the grace of its Founder. The seraphic town or province are Assisi and Umbria, associated with the glory of Francis and of his Order in having been the birthplace of both. Everything connected with S. Francis has gained something from the miracle.

La Vernia had the privilege of being the scene of the event, and it has thereby become dear to Christian piety. People come from the ends of the earth to visit it. The children of S. Francis especially honour it, and love to ascend thither and meditate on the sacred spot. S. Bonaventura, shortly after he was named general of the Order, wrote there his pamphlet: “On the Six Wings of the Seraphim,” and his famous treatise: “The Itinerary of the Soul to God.” The Church herself has adopted the sacred mountain. In 1260 seven bishops, those of Arezzo, Florence, Fiesole, Perugia, Assisi, Urbino, and Città di Castello, on horseback, and preceded by the people carrying the cross and banners, and religious carrying lighted candles and singing psalms, went round it in procession to bless it

<sup>1</sup> This work, divided into ten strophes of seven lines each, of very simple construction, with a regular number of syllables, and mostly correct rhymes, shows the trace of a skilful hand, perhaps that of a disciple charged with retouching the Master's inspiration. But, all the same, we find in it the boldness of the genius of S. Francis, the precision of his language, and, in short, the whole impression of a great event that had set its miraculous seal upon his person. Ozanam, “The Franciscan Poets,” p. 74.



under the name of the seraphic mountain. Five years before, Pope Alexander IV., a friend of the Order, had recommended it to the Christian world in a bull, with these words : " We have a hearty affection for the famous and flourishing mountain of La Vernia, remembering that it was there that the love which glowed in Francis flamed still brighter at the sight of the seraph, and bursting forth caused the Saint to receive those marvellous wounds that gave him the likeness to one crucified. Who can love his eternal salvation and not delight exceedingly in this place ? "

We will conclude with the words in which S. Bonaventura ends the chapter on the stigmata in his life of the Saint. He addresses Francis thus : " And now oh valorous knight of Jesus Christ, bear the arms of that invincible chief, with them thou wilt vanquish every enemy. Carry the banner of this great King, the sight of it alone will give courage to all the soldiers of the divine army. Bear the seal of this Sovereign Pontiff, it will force the world to respect thy words and works as being irreproachable and authentic. No one can henceforth trouble thee, thou hast in thy body the stigmata of Jesus Christ. The whole world is bound to offer thee loving devotion. These marks that thou most certainly didst receive, not on the testimony of two or three witnesses only, though that would have sufficed, but on that of a number of persons, give, in thee and by thee, new authority to divine truth. They take away all excuse from the incredulous ; they strengthen the faith of Christians, animate their hope and inflame their charity." (S. Bon., p. 391.)

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In the church of Ognissanti at Florence there is preserved the habit worn by S. Francis at the time he received the sacred stigmata. The history of this most precious relic is as follows. At the end of the year 1224, the Saint, after receiving the stigmata, left the mountain of La Vernia and went to the castle of Montauto, the owner of which, Count Alberto Barbolani, was his devoted friend and also a Tertiary. On his departure, at the count's request, he presented him with the habit he had been wearing, and promised besides, that before the death of any member of the count's family, lights should be seen burning upon the castle, which thing has been witnessed so late as during the last century. In 1502, the castle was taken by the Florentines, and the habit was then removed to

Florence by express order of the Council of Ten, who sent a special deputation to fetch it. Amongst them was Fra Mariano da Firenze, whose MS. account of the transaction is now in the convent of Ognissanti. Until the year 1571, the habit was kept in the church of S. Salvatore near S. Miniato, it was then finally transferred to Ognissanti and placed under the high altar in that church, where it is to this day. It is enclosed in three cases. The outer one is a very ancient bronze casket, supposed by some to have been brought to Italy by Charlemagne, within that is another of inlaid wood, containing an ebony box, in which is the relic visible through a glass panel. The tunic is of woollen material, woven with white and unbleached threads, and is of the same form as that still worn by the Franciscans, except that the hood is nearly square and lacks the piece that passes round the neck and ends in a point behind, an addition made by S. Bonaventura. It is patched under the arms, and shows marks of where the cord has rubbed it. Only on very rare occasions has it been taken out of its case, at the request of some distinguished personage.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### HIS NATURAL QUALITIES.

FROM the day that the Saint had been wounded on La Vernia his strength continually languished. His life from this time was to be far more an interior than an exterior life. Occasionally, indeed, sustained by his great energy, he visited Umbria, mounted on an ass, and let the people hear the voice they so much loved ; and sometimes he even contemplated greater projects, but they were the last rays of the sun that was sinking to the horizon. Before the luminary is entirely hidden in the abyss of God, we will pause awhile, and gather together a number of scattered instances which have found no place in the narrative because they are undated. They are interesting and expressive, and if they do not reveal to us new aspects, at least they will throw a fuller light upon those that have already come before us. The Saint's physiognomy will come out stronger and more lifelike. We will first take the qualities which formed the basis of his nature ; there are four which appear to us to have characterised him more than the rest—intelligence, sincerity, joy, and courage.

First : His intelligence. This quality stands out so clearly from all that we have said, that it would be superfluous to try to establish it. Every one of our readers must have often said to himself before this, what a rich nature this man had received from God ! and must have seen that in this richness intelligence held the first place. This intelligence was distinguished by three qualities.

In the first place, it was *intuitive*. This was, perhaps, its chief character. We give this attribute to the mind that, without effort, by its own force penetrates to the truth and

promptly resolves a difficult problem. Whether in respect to the great inspirations which ruled his life, or to those lights on matters of detail that a leader of men should find on the spur of the moment, Francis was guided by intuition alone. He had never studied, he often said that he was without letters, and though his humility exaggerated a little, he certainly had not much acquired knowledge. It was by *intuition* that, as a youth, he so well understood the noble, elevated, chivalrous side of *the songs of geste*, that he made it the starting point of his moral progress, and the form of his whole life ; by intuition he discerned in voluntary poverty the true remedy for the horrible evils from which the Church knew not how to free herself ; by intuition, under the name of the Third Order, he grouped the population of that day into a vast association which was to withdraw them from the hardness and injustice of the feudal system. We should say that this latter intuition bordered on genius, were it not that the assistance, and perhaps the inspiration, of Cardinal Ugolino had some share in it. Here is another example on a less important matter, a simple interpretation of a text, but Francis appears in it at his best. He was lying sick at Siena. A Preaching Friar, a man versed in spiritual matters, and a doctor in theology, came to visit him. They were conversing on the things of God. In the course of conversation, the preacher said to Francis, " Tell me, my brother, how you interpret that word of Ezekiel : ' If you announce not his wickedness to the sinner, I will require of you an account of his soul.' For my part, I know many sinners to whom I never speak of their state. Shall I be responsible for their loss ? " Francis began excusing himself, saying he had much greater need of being instructed himself than of teaching others. The preacher insisted : " I have already consulted more than one learned man on these words, I should like to have your opinion." Francis gave this excellent answer : " Supposing the words are to be taken in a universal sense,<sup>1</sup> this is how I should

<sup>1</sup> This is, perhaps, the only instance in which Francis made use of a scholastic term.



understand them : the life of the true servant of God, and the light of his words and example should be such that they become like a voice reproving all sinners. The fame of his deeds, the odour of his holiness suffice, in this sense, for the accomplishment of what the prophet demands." The preacher was astonished. As he went away, he said to the companions of Francis : "Your Founder's theology has the flight of an eagle ; ours creeps and crawls on the ground."

The mind of Francis was in the second place *solid*. A mind is solid when it goes of its own accord straight to what is important, and stops at the exact point where excess begins. That of Francis fulfilled this condition in a high degree. Celano says : "In the things of God, he left vain ornaments, circumlocution, all that belongs to pomp and display to those who are destined to perish ; for his part he cared not for the bark but for the pith, not for the shell but for the nut, not for the multiple but for the one only sovereign good." In other words, his sure judgment at once detected the fundamental principle. Still more remarkable was the sense that preserved him from all exaggeration. His impulsive nature, we can imagine, might have made him easily carried away by excitement, but Celano tells us that, on the contrary, he was wonderfully sober in spirit. We know, for instance, how highly he appreciated contemplation. One day a brother was brought to him who passed his days in prayer, and affected silence to such a point that he made his confessions by signs, that he might never have to speak. Francis was not deceived. He at once suspected one of those cases of eccentricity which, going beyond bounds, soon come to a sudden end. In vain the religious at the convent, thinking their brother a real saint, tried to recommend him. "Stop," he said ; "do not praise what is but an illusion and a snare of the devil." They all protested, the vicar-general as well as the others, as if the judgment were too severe. The event, however, was not long in justifying it. The pretended saint, when once

he was unmasked, lost heart, threw off the habit, and came to a bad end. Poverty was even dearer than contemplation to the holy Founder. "It is the queen of virtues," he often said, and we have seen how jealously he guarded her honour. But in this, too, he desired there should be a limit, and he drew the line himself when necessary. He was once told that two Minors had been publicly reprimanded by the Bishop of Fonda for wearing long beards in an untidy and dirty state. "Beware," the Bishop said, "lest you render odious and ridiculous a religion that in the beginning God made beautiful." Francis, who never considered dirt as an attribute of poverty, quite agreed with the Bishop. He blamed the brethren severely, though they had acted from a good motive. The same regard for measure and limits led him to order that in all the convent gardens there should be a little place set apart for cultivating sweet-scented and gaily-coloured flowers. This rule, though it had an appearance of almost aristocratic luxury, did not seem to him at all in contradiction to his chosen virtue. The poorest have some flower beside their cottage on which they can gaze. It is a beam from the beauty of God which comes into their souls after their day's work, to refresh and elevate them. The poor of Jesus Christ were subjected to labours and privations as much or more than the other poor, and Francis thought that being in the same condition, they experienced the same wants. He was not enslaved to any one idea.

In the third place, the intellect of Francis was *poetical*. This again is a gift, and whatever people may think, it is an excellent gift. We remember the fine method that Plato in his Banquet teaches for attaining to God. It is to pass from material beauty to beauty of sentiment, from beauty of sentiment to beauty of thought, until from one beauty to another we arrive at the imperishable Beauty perfect and uncreated. The true poet ascends this ladder with an easier and more graceful step than other men. He discovers the harmony of creation better than they; he is borne, as though on wings, to the Author of all things, who is God, and he

delights himself and reposes in this centre of all beauty. At this height we may say that poetry and theology meet and touch one another. Witness the Psalms of David, or to take an example nearer to the Saint, the hymns in Dante's "Paradiso." The poetic spirit in Francis was of the same kind. It gave him a perpetual revelation of God. One day the missionary of Jesus Christ arrived at a village, accompanied by Brother Masseo. Both were suffering from hunger, and they began to beg, taking different sides of the place. When they had received as much as was necessary for their wants, they met outside the village at a spot where there was a broad smooth stone lying under some trees that formed a pleasant shade above it. Close by was a spring of pure water. Francis was charmed with the beauty of the place; he uttered a loud exclamation of joy: "O Brother Masseo, what a treasure! what a treasure! We are not worthy of it." Brother Masseo, who was arranging his fragments of food on the stone, only thought of the misery of such a meal. He answered: "Father, how canst thou talk of a treasure where there is such poverty, and all the most necessary things are absent? I see no table-cloth, or knife, or cup; no house, or table, or manservant, or maidservant." Francis, whose thoughts were thousands of miles away from that artificial luxury, and entirely absorbed in what was before his eyes, the true luxury that God offers to His children, replied: "That is exactly what I look upon as a treasure; here nothing has been prepared by human industry, all is given us by God, this bread of alms, this table made of a fine stone, this pure spring of water. Therefore I wish to ask Him to make us love the treasure of holy poverty." Having said these words, they prayed together and made their repast on the fragments of bread and the water from the spring; then they arose and continued their journey towards France.<sup>1</sup> We find here the poet as well as the Saint. It was the same on many other occa-

<sup>1</sup> "Fioretti di S. Francesco," xiii. This anecdote is not found in the histories of S. Francis.

sions. We shall shortly see with what clear and pure sight Francis read the book of Nature. On all sides he found incentives to emotion. But emotion alone did not satisfy him. Like all whose souls are full, he was sometimes tormented with the desire to reproduce the beauty that had touched him. He wished to move and delight others as he himself had been moved and delighted. No one can give due homage to beauty who stops short of this. Francis composed poetry. It is true that he was too little acquainted with the laws of art to advance very far in this direction. He only uttered a cry, but that cry found an echo. "It was," says Ozanam, "the first cry of a nascent poetry which has grown and made itself heard throughout the world."<sup>1</sup>

His sincerity. *Vere Franciscus qui cor francum et nobile gessit*, Celano says. Perhaps frankness would be a better title than sincerity, for the latter is content to say nothing but what is true, the former loves freedom and daylight, under all circumstances, and Francis was of this kind. But in any case, there was a foundation of honesty in the Saint that made deceit, even if it was involuntary, hateful to him. Whether he were in intercourse with God, or with men, or with himself, he carried the love of truth to the extent of a passion. He exacted an actual and perfect agreement always between his thoughts and his words. He wished others to be able to read his heart as he read it himself. He exposed his most secret acts to the judgment of those with whom he lived, above all, if he thought that doing so was to his own detriment. "In all things," Celano says, "he was a truly simple man, the friend of all sincerity." We will give some examples of this remarkable conduct.

He judged distractions in prayer more severely than they are usually judged. "How shameful," he said, "to allow

<sup>1</sup> "The Franciscan Poets in Italy," p. 74. An Italian poet has said, no less gracefully :—

E fu allor che l'italica favella  
Qui balbettò le prime  
Ingenue sue rime.



oneself to fall into vain distractions when one is addressing the Great King! We should not speak in that manner even to a respectable man." For his part, he was not content with merely having the habit of those sentiments that he offered to God, he required to feel them at the very moment when he was expressing them, otherwise his offering seemed to him to be false and miserable. He confessed it as a secret lie, and chastised himself immediately for it. These methods, united to a strong will, made him entire master of himself; he could fix his mind so that no one could disturb it. "He suffered no more from flies of that kind," said his historian, meaning that he had no more distractions.

One day he met the Abbot of the monastery of S. Giustino near Perugia. The Abbot, who was on horseback, dismounted to discourse with him about the salvation of his soul. On leaving, he asked Francis to pray for him. "Willingly, my lord," replied Francis. Hardly had the other departed when Francis said to his companion: "Wait a little for me, my brother; I am going to kneel down and discharge the obligation that I have just contracted." He always acted thus. He said that instead of throwing this kind of promise behind one's back, *post tergum*, as is too often done, it ought to be accomplished as quickly as possible. In the last years of his life, when he was very ill, his guardian, who was also his companion, seeing him in a cold winter with nothing on but one tunic very much patched, had compassion on him. He secretly got a piece of fox skin. "My father," he said, showing it to him, "you suffer from your liver and stomach; I entreat you, in God's name, to let me sew this skin under your tunic. If you will not have it all, at least let it cover your stomach." Francis did not refuse. "I accept what you wish," he said, "but you must sew as large a piece outside as in." The guardian did not see the reason of that. "It is quite plain," replied Francis; "the outside piece will show the brethren that I allow myself this comfort." They had to give in

to his wish. "Oh, admirable man!" his historian exclaims, "thou hast always been the same within and without, in words and in deeds, below and above!" The same feeling made him wish to reveal certain things that he had done, and though he did not reproach himself for them, yet he thought that if they were known they would surprise people and perhaps make their esteem for him a little lower. Thus, when preaching at Christmas in the hermitage of Podio, he began his sermon in this way: "You think me a Saint who is quite above the things of this world; that is why you are come here so eagerly. You are greatly mistaken. I, whom you see before you, I have eaten food cooked with lard all through last Lent." He went still further on another occasion. This time he had eaten chicken during an illness. As soon as he got better he thought that such a luxury ought not to be kept secret. "What!" he said, "these people think I keep perpetual abstinence, and shall I allow myself these good things without telling them of it. It would be a shame to do so." Consequently, he went up to Assisi with one of his brethren, and as soon as they reached the gates of the town he put a cord round his neck, and went through the streets in that fashion, making his companion cry: "See, here is a glutton who eats chicken in secret." S. Bonaventura confesses that this was going a little too far. "The example," he says, "is more to be admired than imitated." But the people did not for a moment mistake the motive that animated him. Tears were in all their eyes. "And he makes this confession to us," they said, "to us who are sunk in good living and debauchery. Woe be to us!" And they promised to amend. Such is the empire of sincerity. Bossuet wrote: "It is manifest that the pleasure of man is man."<sup>1</sup> The charm becomes irresistible in presence of a soul pure as the waters of a limpid spring. There was but one more step to be taken on this path—that of publishing his faults and restoring the custom of public confession. Francis took

<sup>1</sup> First sermon on the Feast of the Circumcision.

the step. His faults were not great ones, only a few movements of vain complacency, which probably merely passed through his mind without affecting it much ; but this was enough to make him accuse himself before all who were present. To judge from what he said, he was nothing but a "vessel of wrath" in the house of God.

With his passion for sincerity towards others, Francis had no less strong a desire to see himself clearly. We have a proof of this in a spiritual drama, full of originality and grandeur, in which we discover all the motions of his soul. The circumstance took place at the hermitage of Satriano, and it must have been towards the beginning of his apostolic life. One night, after he had prolonged his devotions to a very late hour, his body, wearied though submissive, began to expostulate. The devil, who is active in times of weakness, took advantage of its complaints. "Francis, Francis, Francis." "What is it?" he answered. "There is not a sinner in the world whom God is not ready to pardon if he is converted ; but he who kills himself with excessive penances will find no mercy in the next life." This was an invitation to an easier life, and Francis recognised the enemy. Instantly the temptation, remaining the same in reality, took another form. The Saint, who had a tender soul, thought within himself that he might have avoided all his fatigues, and have had a home like most other men, and have led a tranquil life in it. At the same time, his whole nature was stirred. At the first attack he stood up, stripped off his tunic, seized his cord and scourged himself rapidly. "Ah ! brother ass," he said, "this is what you want." Still the temptation did not depart ; it seemed to take greater hold upon him. Finding external methods powerless to drive it away, Francis saw but one remedy—to look the phantom resolutely in the face and judge it. It was winter ; the garden was covered with snow. Francis went out into it as he was, without his clothes. "No, no," he said, "no tunic, it is a religious habit ; a man given up to such thoughts would be a robber if he wore it." Saying these

words he went into the snow, and taking it up in his hands he made with it seven statues that he began to consider. "Well," he said to the excited being within him, "see this big one, this is thy wife, these two are thy sons, those two are thy daughters, and the two others are thy servants, for they are necessary for the wants of the house. Now, set to work, they must all be clothed ; see, they are dying of cold. Here there will be all kinds of trouble. If thou object to that, there is nothing for it but to remain in the service of God." At these words the phantom vanished. In this kind of acted parable Francis saw that all life is an effort. He returned to his cell at peace, and convinced that his was the better part. In the course of his future work he was never again troubled with temptations of that nature.

We read in the Epistle to the Corinthians, "Our glory is this: the testimony of our conscience that we have lived in this world in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God." We do not know that S. Francis ever said this, but if he did not say it, he, like the Apostle, did it. That it is his glory also, we, as well as his contemporaries, bear him witness.

His joy and amiability. The king, in the Book of Wisdom, in enumerating the favours with which God had blessed him, rejoices, amongst other things, in having received "a good soul." If by this we understand a soul to whom life was a pleasure, one that could adapt itself easily to all situations, and was easily susceptible of joy, Francis also had been endowed with that gift. We remember the account of his youth. At first he had been seduced by the brightness and glitter of exterior things. Then he took to the *gay science*, to poetry, to what S. Augustine so well named carnal letters, *litteræ carnales*,<sup>1</sup> that is to say, those in which imagination has more place than intellect, and in which we are especially sensible to rhythm and harmony, and to human grace and beauty. His historians have given us his portrait at that period. He had every

<sup>1</sup> "De Musica," lib. vi. cap. i.



attraction that could please. "His exquisite sweetness," says S. Bonaventura, "his elegant manners, his good temper, his incomparable affability, his generosity, which gave without counting the cost, all was the revelation of a happy, natural disposition and the prelude to the blessings which awaited him." When the time of more abundant blessings was come, God began by destroying all that external enchantment, and then, partly through sufferings, partly by gentler attraction, He marked out his life and based it this time upon truth, initiating him into solid joys; what Celano calls the great and real joys of the spirit. Joy is indeed the normal state of those whom God loves; it may not be a special virtue, but it results from fundamental virtues. Faith, hope, and charity cannot have their full force and produce all their effects without bringing it in their train; it is the flower, the development, the fruit of the Christian life. Hence it is that we find its name so often on the pages of the New Testament. Hence, also, that surprising expression of S. Paul's, which thoughtless or rebellious men are inclined to take as ironical, "Rejoice always." Little by little it was given to Francis to understand this, that without it everything languishes and dies. The soul, deprived of vigour and energy, is like a land without heat and sun, and from this point of view other things became clear to him; the fury with which the devil attacks this gift in us, and the obligation we are under to defend it as one defends a treasure. "The devil," he said, "carries dust with him, and whenever he can he throws it into the openings of the soul in order to trouble the clearness of its thoughts and the purity of its acts. If joy knows how to defend itself and subsists, then he has had his spite for nothing; but if the servant of Christ becomes sad, bitter, unhappy, he is sure to triumph. Sooner or later that soul will be absorbed and overwhelmed by its sadness, or it will seek for false joys and consolations."

With such ideas we see why Francis regarded sadness as a most formidable disease. His own nature, with its

elasticity and energy, seldom felt its attacks, but if they came, far from succumbing to them, he did everything to get rid of them as quickly as possible. The first and most powerful of his remedies was prayer. "The servant of God," he said, "who is troubled for any reason (and he allowed that the causes of trouble in this world are numerous) must immediately have recourse to prayer, and remain in the presence of his Heavenly Father until the joy of salvation has been restored to him. Otherwise the Babylonian disease—for it was thus he expressed the horror with which sadness inspired him—will increase, and engender a rust in the soul which will cover it entirely, and will only disappear at the cost of torrents of tears."

After prayer, Francis sometimes did not disdain to employ more external methods. Towards the end of his life, being threatened with blindness, he went to Rieti to have his eyes attended to. Darkness was closing in upon him in spite of remedies; it was a grief to him, and for a moment he felt as if his strength of mind would give way. Immediately he sent for one of the brethren, who had played the guitar when he was in the world. "My brother," he said, "the children of this world understand nothing of the divine sacraments. Music has been given us that we may sing the praises of God; they only use it for the delight of their ears. I should be happy if, without drawing attention, thou could'st borrow some instrument and sing me a beautiful hymn, *versum honestum*. It would be a great relief to my brother the body, who is overwhelmed with illness." "I would willingly do what you ask me," replied the brother, "but unfortunately there is danger that people might see in such an act something unbefitting a religious." "Say no more," answered Francis, "there are many such things that we must renounce for fear of giving scandal." The following night he lay awake, meditating and praying. Suddenly he heard the sound of a most harmonious lute playing a very sweet melody. No one was to be seen, but judging from the sound, which seemed to come and go at a nearer or

a further distance, it appeared that the musician was walking up and down under the window. The Saint, absorbed in God, was so penetrated with the sweetness of these tones that for a moment he thought he had passed to a better life. In the morning, he sent for the same brother. "God who comforts the afflicted," he said, "has never left me without consolation. I was not permitted to hear human music, but I have heard the far more delicious music of an inhabitant of heaven."

It is true he had not always such miraculous help at his service, but he was full of resources in himself. Remembering the Apostle's counsel, "Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord," he meditated constantly and sang canticles in French, for he was greatly inclined towards that nation. At such times he frequently accompanied himself on a sort of violin that he had made with two sticks and a string stretched over them, and that he played on with all the gestures of a musician. He did what orators and poets do when in private they try by their actions to awaken their sleeping inspiration. He knew that joy requires a stimulus, because it does not always flourish by itself in the solitude of the soul, and by these external means he sought to rouse it from its hiding place. When once it broke forth, the childish instrument dropped from his hands, ideas and thoughts flooded his soul, warm tears filled his eyes, he often fell into a state of rapture. "I have witnessed all that," says Celano.

Francis had a motive for so carefully cultivating joy. He required that amiability should be shown towards all men, and without joy he did not think it possible to be amiable for long. One of his companions appeared in the society of his brethren with a long, sad countenance. Francis was extremely annoyed at it. "My brother," he said, "if thou hast some fault to mourn over do it in thy cell ; groan and weep before thy God, but here, with thy brethren, be as

they are in tone and countenance." And as he had been somewhat disturbed, he added, "I am truly a mark for the jealousy of the demons; those enemies of the human race, finding they could not trouble me in myself, trouble me in my brethren." His impression on this subject was so strong that at one of the general Chapters that shortly followed he had this advice written up in large letters: "Let the brethren avoid ever appearing sombre, sad, and clouded like the hypocrites, but let them always be found joyful in the Lord, gay, amiable, and gracious, as is fitting."

He was the first to practice what he exacted from others. We have seen, from S. Bonaventura, that in his youth affability was a quality that he possessed in an unusual degree, and it continued to increase as he advanced in virtue. Without ceasing to shew itself in his external manners, it became a principle in his heart, creating within it a combination of respect and kindness towards all men that rendered him lovable in a singular degree. We know that he gave the name of courtesy to this state, and he believed that courtesy added something to charity. He gave it to her as a younger sister, who was to accompany the elder one and help to open all hearts to her. So his historians tell us. He was very courteous and gracious in all things, and possessed a peace and serenity that nothing could disturb. This sympathy and benevolence were expressed in his countenance; his face had in it something angelic; no one could see him, much less converse with him, without the clouds on their mind that they had brought with them being dissipated as though by enchantment.<sup>1</sup> This portrait may help us to understand a privilege which distinguishes him even amongst

<sup>1</sup> His theory of courtesy was kept up for a certain time in his family, and at length they conceived so high an idea of it as to make it one of the Divine attributes. In the life of S. Margaret of Cortona, God is hardly ever called the Almighty, or the Most High. He is often designated by these words: The Lord of all courtesy, the very courteous Lord. God said to the Saint: I have sought thee courteously, and the Saint, like a true daughter of S. Francis, answered: Thou hast sought me courteously, O Lord. This shows how the spirit of S. Francis was shed abroad, and what a spirit of sweetness and grace it was.



Saints. Throughout his active life he had little or nothing to suffer from other men. As a simple deacon he founded a great Order, introduced great changes into civil and religious society without encountering one envious opponent, or one adversary. Far from wishing to contradict him, the greatest and most diverse persons were his admirers and supporters. From the Sovereign Pontiff to the Sultan of Egypt, all fell under his charm and remained beneath its influence. The populace was even more completely gained over to him. They surrounded him with a species of worship, especially towards the close of his life. There was universal rejoicing as soon as it was known that he was coming. The bells were rung and the clergy and people went out to meet him, singing hymns and carrying branches in their hands. As soon as he appeared in sight, there was one long cry of joy. Everyone thronged and pressed to get near him, and struggled to hear his voice, to see the light of his eyes, and to kiss the hem of his garment. He entered a town as in triumph. It is no exaggeration to say that in the thirteenth century he was the consolation and delight of Italy.<sup>1</sup>

His courage. Amiable natures are not unfrequently deficient on the side of energy. It was not so with Francis. God, who knows how to unite force and gentleness, had endowed him with this double attribute. He was "strong as a diamond," to borrow the expression of a religious of the present day. "Those who have made experience of his magnanimity," said Celano, "know well how free and fearless he was in attitude, how intrepid and sure of himself in his acts, how courageous and full of decision in his contempt for the things of this world."

His life began in a way that one destined to perform courageous deeds might have envied. At the age of twenty he fought in the front ranks of the army of the Commune of Assisi. A few years later, he started on horseback to go and fight against the Germans in Apulia. His eyes sparkled with

<sup>1</sup> Some of these details have already been given in chap. viii.

fire ; he had such great ideas that he expected to gain some appanage at the sword's point, like the famous adventurers of those days. His heart remained the same after God had caused him to change his sentiments and his object in life. The most cruel enemies of the Christian religion, the Mussulmans, occupied immense territories in the East and West. He went successively in these two directions, and alone and unarmed provoked them to the battle of truth. To hear that he will risk his life in this enterprise did but add to its attraction for him ; he would die for God, knowing how great is the honour of martyrdom. If we were to go over his whole life again, we should find most of his actions marked with the stamp of valour and heroism. It will be better to say what we have not yet mentioned, and to show how he faced difficulties when they presented themselves in his way.

Although nature in general was kind to him, yet he sometimes found her adverse, and he had given her greater power over him by carrying poverty to the extent he did. For instance, he felt the severity of weather more than others who are well protected against it. If he was too much of an Italian for heat to affect him much, his delicate organisation suffered greatly from cold. He said one day : " If we loved God well, that divine love would keep up a gentle warmth in all our members." He did love God well, nevertheless the wind and cold made him shiver sometimes. This is how he behaved on an occasion of that kind. His body was shivering in the north wind till it seemed to be begging for mercy. Fearing it might be a beginning of self-indulgence, he climbed a mountain without his tunic, and went on walking for a long time against the sharp wind. When he felt that his self-conquest was complete, " Now," he said, as he put on his garment again, " I shall be quite warm in my tunic."

He had gained such mastery over his flesh that it rarely revolted, but he had to undergo several of those internal combats which had troubled the Apostle. He went into

them as he would have gone into the battles he had dreamed of. His body called for pleasure, he unhesitatingly led it to suffering. We saw him in a recent example seize his cord to conquer the rebel. At other times he threw it into the brambles and thorns that he might stifle its attempts at insubordination in blood. The poor body, thus ruled by an iron will, became docile and supple to an extraordinary degree. It followed the spirit as a trained dog follows its master. Wheresoever the spirit desired to lead it, it not only offered no resistance, it even anticipated its will. Francis at length came to regard the poor conquered body with a sort of compassion. He recognised that it was a good servant, and asked himself, with his candid conscientiousness, whether he had given it all that a good servant deserved.

He had more trouble with certain yet undisciplined sides of the lower mind. A temptation came to him, probably bordering on sensitiveness and the imagination, the object of which we do not know, but it lasted several years, and was one of the trials of his life. He prayed, he wept, he even chastised his body, which was not in fault, but nothing seemed of any use. At last God, who had been trying him, as He often tries the best of His servants, sent him light which caused the phantom to vanish. As he was praying in S. Mary of the Portiuncula, he heard in spirit the following words: "Francis, if thou hadst faith as a grain of mustard seed, thou wouldst say to the mountain: remove from thence, and it would remove." "And what, O Lord, is this mountain that I could move?" "It is thy temptation," replied the voice. "O Lord," he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "be it done to me as Thou hast said." Immediately the temptation disappeared, his soul was free, and great peace was diffused through his whole being. These repeated victories taught him that temptations are not without profit. He considered them at last as a salutary exercise for the courageous and the strong. He loved them as a good soldier loves a battle. This is how he explained it once

when he was sitting on a bench in company with one of the brethren. "My good father," said the latter, "pray for me and then I shall be delivered from my temptations. You know that I am tormented beyond my strength." Francis replied: "It is these very temptations that make me look upon you as the true servant of God. Be assured that the more you are tempted, the more I love you." And he added, "A temptation overcome is like the ring with which God affiances a soul. No one can reckon himself a true servant of God unless he has passed through temptation and suffering. I see many who flatter themselves they have made great spiritual progress because for years they have experienced no temptation. Let them know that God treats them thus gently through consideration for their weakness. He only calls those whose strength is established, to fight in great combats."

After nature and the flesh, there remained the one whom Christian language emphatically names the Enemy. How are those angels fallen, who were once so beautiful, that they should have become jealous of God and persecutors of the Saints! Yet they have come to this. There are times when, according to our Lord's words, they desire to sift the strongest amongst God's children, "as wheat is sifted." Francis, who was truly one of that family, could not escape being a mark for their animosity. Several times they came in troops against him, and overwhelmed him with ill-treatment, hoping to conquer him. Celano relates two of these occasions. Francis arrived late one evening at a church far away from any habitations. He desired to spend the night in prayer. "Go and sleep at the hospital," he said to his companion, "and come back to me to-morrow at daybreak." Left alone with God, he passed hours in prayer, after which he leaned his head against the wall to rest himself a little. At that moment he felt his whole body violently agitated, and terror took possession of his mind. Divining from whence this unexpected assault proceeded, he stood up at once, and making the sign



of the cross he cried, "Wicked spirits, I ask of you, in the name of Almighty God, to employ all the malice that is permitted to you against my body. It is my greatest adversary, in ill-treating it you will revenge me upon it." This proud attitude disconcerted the demons. They found that, instead of filling him with fear, they could only fortify his virtue, and accordingly they departed at once and left him in peace. The other scene took place in Rome, in the palace of Cardinal Leo Brancaleoni, one of the Saint's avowed protectors. This time the attack was so rude, the blows so thick and heavy, that Francis seems to have somewhat given way. He did not feel himself quite on his own ground in a palace surrounded by luxury. Half-dead, he called to his companion who was in a room close by, "My brother, come to me. The devils are assaulting me furiously, I fear to remain alone." He trembled all over, as though stricken by fever. When his companion had come to him, he said, "My brother, the devils are the executioners of the divine justice. I know that God shows special grace to His servants when He lets them not remain unpunished for anything in this life. But I can remember no offence that, thanks to His grace and mercy, I have not given satisfaction for. He, indeed, in His condescension towards me, has always made known in my meditations whatever pleased or displeased Him in me. Perhaps to-day He has given me up to His executioners because this sojourn with the great has an evil appearance. My brethren who are living in our poor houses, when they hear that I am with Cardinals, may think that I am in the midst of luxuries. Therefore, since I am set up for an example to them, it seems better that I should depart from courtly mansions. By suffering hardships and privations with my brethren I shall fortify them to bear hardships and privations themselves." The next morning he related the affair to the Cardinal, and made his excuses to him for a hurried departure.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HIS LOVE TO GOD.

“WHO can tell of the ardent charity with which this friend of the spouse was inflamed?” So speaks S. Bonaventura at the beginning of his chapter on the relation of Francis with God. He was right, Doctor and Saint as he was. Only He who, by His grace, creates these chaste mysteries of love could fitly express their purity and depth. It will readily be understood that in no part of this history are we so sensible of our weakness as we are here. We earnestly entreat the Author of every perfect gift to put away from our thoughts and words whatever might be in the least unsuitable to the subject we are approaching.

In acts of tenderness, it is not we who make the first steps towards God. We are prevented. Therefore, in treating of the charity of a saintly soul, we must first show the divine advances which predetermined it. In the case of S. Francis, they were marvellously sweet and attractive. God had made him for Himself, and as a first gift, He granted him a soul that was sensible to His beauty. “His heart,” says Celano, “was a perfect instrument; as soon as the words ‘love of God’ touched it, as a violin responds to the bow, every chord within it vibrated, and gave forth powerful and harmonious tones.” We saw one example of this when he was still in the flower of his youth. Whenever a beggar, asking alms, asked them for the love of God, Francis felt his soul stirred to its depths. This was but a beginning. God was Himself going to cultivate the rich ground He had prepared. What a revelation of Himself He made to him by whom He desired to be loved! He drew Him within, He spoke to him in solitude as a friend speaks to a friend. He discovered to him the

mysteries of His Passion, that greatest mystery of His tenderness. Then He told him that He would give him an office to fill in His Church. We remember how these successive revelations affected Francis. His heart trembled, his countenance became pale and changed. He understood, with the Saints, all the length and breadth, and height and depth of the great gift he had received.

We read in the Holy Scriptures that when Wisdom has found souls worthy of him, he rejoices, and remains with them, accompanying them in all their ways with infinite attention. God, seeing that His friend was worthy of His favours, contracted a definite alliance with him. He regarded him as His own, and from His plenitude lavished gifts upon him. He became the light, the sweetness, and the strength of the Saint's life.

He penetrated the highest truths. "Nor should this privilege astonish us," Celano says. "His spirit, victorious over the world and passion, had a wide flight. By right of a pure heart he entered the bosom of eternal light. There, at the source of truth, from the Word of God Himself, he imbibed the words that afterwards resounded with such sweetness from his lips." The same historian shows Francis with his eyes constantly fixed on the divine light, who, manifesting Himself to him, taught him what to say and do, and even showed him things that were going to happen.

In the society of his God, Francis continually tasted of new joys. S. Bonaventura explains it thus: "He loved God so much, and God repaid his love with such familiar tenderness that he seemed always to feel the constant presence of his Saviour beside him. This he confided to his companions in a moment of intimate conversation." We may add that God spared S. Francis from what most of His Saints have suffered at some period or other of their lives—apparent abandonment and deprivation of His presence; and Francis escaped all dryness and languor of spirit, so that no cloud ever dimmed the brightness of his union with God.

The work S. Francis accomplished was a very great one. "Because he was not alone," says Celano, "the Lord was with him and accompanied him wherever he went: He sustained him with His presence, encouraged him with His benefits, consoled him with His visits." Francis, left to himself, must have succumbed under a burden surpassing human strength. But God took him by the hand, He inclined men's hearts before him; and by His help, in twenty years this ignorant young merchant changed the whole face of religious and civil society.

God took pleasure in him, His creature, and came to him continually to elevate and perfect him, because He loved him.

To express the way in which the Saint received this divine love can only be done by comparing it to the emotion felt by a profound nature when it responds to a love worthy of itself; but such emotion in him was far more radiant and intoxicating, because of the sublime beauty of Him who caused it. We will endeavour to give some of the principal characteristics of this emotion from the testimony of those who lived with S. Francis.

His heart was filled with the purest delight. "With what joy," says Celano, "do you suppose he was transfused, living as he did in such intimacy with his God? He alone could tell it. For my part, I am still lost in admiration at it. I would I had experienced it that I might the better recount it." "He was transported when he pronounced Thy name, O Lord! and was full of chaste happiness, even as one of Thy friends of ancient times, or rather as a new, an incomparable friend." He was transfigured. "There was a spring of radiant love in him which flowed through his whole being, and burst forth outwardly without his intending it. His countenance lighted up, his face became celestial." "One night," says S. Bonaventura, "he seemed to be surrounded with a luminous cloud." As soon as he heard the voice of his beloved calling, he left everything. "The well-beloved father had contracted the habit of never neglecting any visit of the Holy Spirit. As soon



as He approached, he welcomed Him, and enjoyed and tasted of Him as long as God permitted Him to remain. If he felt the breath of the Holy Spirit while travelling, he would stop, and letting his companions go on before, would give himself up unreservedly to the inspiration that had been sent to him. Wherever he might be, he received no grace of God in vain, nor heard in vain any of His invitations." He nourished himself on love, and desired no other occupation. "These celestial sweets had rendered the world insipid to him; for the gross occupations of men he felt a disgust that he had difficulty in overcoming. Even affairs, his own holy affairs, preaching, pious conversations, he sometimes cut short rather than ended them, and retiring into himself, he hastened to the sweet perfumes of his intimate conversation with God."

He was overwhelmed and absorbed in Him who gave Himself to him. It was the ecstasy of happiness. He knew nothing of what was going on around him. "One day he was going through Borgo San Sepolcro, a very populous locality. He was soon surrounded by a crowd. Thousands of people were touching him, pressing on him, even pulling him, but he was insensible to everything. Like an inanimate body, he neither saw nor heard anything that was going on. At length they got to some distance from the town and the crowd had melted away; they came to the lazar-house where he intended to stay, when, suddenly coming back from a better world, the holy contemplator of heavenly things asked if they were approaching Borgo."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, he had the supreme confidence of those who know they are loved. Success or failure, joy or grief, life or death, he was ready to accept all with equal content from the hand of Him who loved him. If he could have chosen, he would have chosen suffering, because God Himself had chosen it in His life on earth, but he did not choose. "At the name of God, heaven and earth must bow," he used to say. For himself, he always maintained this respectful attitude in

<sup>1</sup> Celano.

presence of his Divine Friend : he desired what He desired ; he asked for His love only ; having that, he was ready to bear and to do anything God might be pleased to appoint for him. His disciples, even the best of them, could not all enter into this entire resignation. They thought, when they saw their venerated master suffering, that God who loved him might have led him by a less rough path, and sometimes they even ventured to express their opinion. When the Saint's life was drawing to a close, and he was unceasingly tortured by illness, one of them said to him : " Ah ! my brother, pray to the Lord that He may treat you more gently. Truly He ought to let His hand weigh less heavily upon you." Hearing these words, the holy man uttered a cry that was a mixture of indignation and complaint. " What is that you are saying ? If I did not know your simplicity, I should from henceforth hold you in horror. What ! you have the audacity to blame God's dealings with me ! " And as though it had been a scandal, he wished to make reparation for it. Weak as he was, he threw himself from his bed, bruising his poor body in doing so. " Oh, my Lord God," he cried, prostrating himself and kissing the ground, " I give Thee thanks for all these pains which I endure, and I pray Thee to send me a hundredfold more if such be Thy good pleasure. I willingly accept all afflictions. Thy Holy Will is my superabundant joy." " The brethren," continues S. Bonaventura, " thought of Job, patient under the hand of the Lord." There was here more than the patience of Job ; there was the greatest thing upon earth—the experience of the pure love of God, self-containing, and by its own power subduing all external forces.

With the delicacy, Francis had all the modesty of a profound affection. We have noted Celano's expression—he experienced chaste happiness in pronouncing the name of God—but we have other proofs besides a casual expression of the historian. He did all he could to hide with an impenetrable veil the favours that he received. His cell, the depth of the woods, the solitude of the fields—these were his

chosen places for intercourse with his God. If by chance he was in public when our Lord came to visit him, he made himself a cell with his mantle that he might be hidden. If he had no mantle, he hid his face with the sleeve of his tunic. He always interposed something between himself and the bystanders to conceal and cover the touches of the Divine Spirit. If he had nothing, he shut himself into the sanctuary of his heart. On such occasions he who was so quick in his movements, and who, when alone, willingly gave the rein to the expression of his emotions, now became motionless ; his lips remained still ; he uttered not even a sigh ; his whole being was concentrated within ; he was there with his God ; the external visible man was without life or action. As soon as he returned from this state, he tried to be like others for fear that a breath of approbation from his brethren might cause him to lose what he had acquired. These stern precautions were the result of a well-considered theory. He professed that all love, the love of God especially, is allied to mystery, and that its most tender manifestations are destroyed if it is subjected to indiscreet exposure. One who speaks of it is seeking his own glory ; he is not entirely absorbed in the happiness of being loved. It is a sort of profanation that must sooner or later be punished. He often said to his intimate friends : " When a servant of God is visited by Him in prayer, before rising, he ought to say to God with clasped hands : ' It is Thou, O Lord, who, notwithstanding my unworthiness and my sins, hast sent me this favour from heaven ; I entrust it to Thy keeping that Thou mayest hold it in reserve for me, because I should be but a robber of Thy treasure.' And when he has ended his prayer, he should show himself to the others as a poor sinner, and as though he had received nothing extraordinary." In reference to those confidences which relieve the overcharged heart, he said : " It is very easy to lose what is inestimable for the sake of a very small advantage, and to provoke the Giver to withhold His gifts from us in the future."

God also Himself protected the secrecy and intimacy of His communications with the Saint. The Bishop of Assisi made experience of this, though his intentions were of the best. He had come to visit Francis at the Portiuncula, as he often did. He thought he would go at once to the cell where the Saint was praying. He pushed open the little door, and was just going in, when he perceived Francis in prayer. Sudden fear came upon him ; his limbs stiffened, and he could not speak. At the same time a divine force pushed him back, and constrained him to retire to a distance. "We must suppose," Celano says, "either that he was not worthy to contemplate those holy mysteries, or that Francis was worthy of having those chaste delights prolonged to him." The astonished Bishop returned to the brethren as soon as he was able, and God restored his speech to him. He then confessed his fault.

After we have received, we must give : this is the law of love, and it is our weak point when our relations with God are concerned. He is so rich, we are so poor—what can we give Him ? "Thou art my God," said David ; "Thou needest not my goods." Feeling this sense of impotency, many Saints have desired to have what they did not possess ; they have asked for a thousand hearts to love with, and a thousand lives that they might offer and sacrifice them all. Such wishes do honour to human generosity. We do not know that the practical mind of S. Francis ever formulated anything of the kind, but he offered what he had. The poor man of Jesus Christ, S. Bonaventura says, like the poor widow commended by our Lord, possessed but two small things, two mites, *duo minuta* : they were his body and his soul. He gave them both, bravely and freely, according to his custom.

First his body. S. Bonaventura says it was like the court of the Temple. In this court there was a perpetual sacrifice. Mindful of the Apostle's words, They who are Christ's crucify their flesh with its passions and concupiscences, Francis kept the sensual appetite in such control that he hardly took what was necessary for his subsistence.



He used to say, that it is difficult to satisfy the needs of the body without at the same time giving satisfaction to the exactions of the senses. Except when he was ill, he rarely partook of cooked food, and if he did so, he either sprinkled it with ashes or made it insipid by deluging it with water. He drank nothing but cold water, and scarcely enough of that to quench his thirst. Each day he added some new privation to the preceding ones. Though he had attained to perfection, he still regarded himself as a beginner, and sought for what was best for him to do. His habitual bed was the bare earth. Sometimes he slept seated on a piece of wood, or with his head resting against a stone. He was covered with a single tunic, and it may be said of him that he served God in nakedness and cold. Being once asked how he could bear the severity of the season in winter, he answered in the fervour of his soul: "If we were burning within with the desire of the celestial country, we should easily bear all the ice outside." He had a horror of soft clothing, he wished to wear coarse things. S. John the Baptist, he said, was praised by God's own mouth because of the roughness of his garments. If he felt a pleasant smoothness in a tunic that had been given him, he would line the inside of it with knots. "It is a fact," he said, "that the devil fears rough materials, while fine ones encourage him to tempt us."

We can see the goal he had in view in these mortifications. Instead of his soul being in subjection to his body, as is too often the case with many, he intended the soul to raise the body to its own level. The body for the soul, the soul for God; this was the law he laid down for his life. This intention appeared clearly when his soul was occupied with some high work, for it was then that he required his body to be associated with it as an auxiliary. During a mission, for instance, his body had to be ardent and courageous: it must go and come, and fatigue itself without uttering a complaint of weariness or weakness. In prayer, especially in public prayer, he demanded yet more from it.

Its whole attitude must express and inspire respect and adoration. He never allowed it to lean against a wall or any other support, whatever might be the state of his health. Throughout the Office he always remained standing, his hood drawn over his head, his eyes lowered, without interruption or repose. In travelling it was the same. If the Saint was on foot, he stopped the moment the hour fixed by the Church had come: if he was riding, he dismounted and stood immoveably in the same place. It mattered not what the weather might be. One day, returning from Rome, he was wet to the skin, because he had said his whole Office exposed to a pouring rain. He justified this practice, saying: "If the body can stop to take nourishment that, like itself, will be food for worms, with what peace and tranquillity ought not the soul to receive its nourishment, which is God!"

In our weakness we think the sacrifice was complete with all this, but the love of Francis thought otherwise. Beyond all these offerings in detail, he perceived an entire offering which tempted his generous heart. Jesus gave His material life for us; it would be grand to sacrifice our life for Him. "Francis always envied the glorious triumph of the martyrs. Animated by that charity which leaves no place for fear, he desired to offer himself to the Saviour as a living host, by the fire of martyrdom, to give back death for death to Jesus Christ who has died for us." Three times, as we have said, he went with this intention to the infidels, and on those occasions there were hours, his historians say, in which he flew rather than walked, so great was his ardour. Three times also God refused him this supreme joy, but though refusing it, He showed how acceptable the desire was to Him by afterwards miraculously making of Francis the living image of Him whom we call the Lamb slain, and the Pattern and Strength of Martyrs.

All these things took place more or less without, in what S. Bonaventura calls the court of the Temple. In the Temple itself, says the holy Doctor, there was a more spiritual

sacrifice, the perfume of incense rose incessantly to the Lord. This incense was the love and the prayers of S. Francis.

"Would that it were given us to make known the sublimity of his prayers, at least as far as we have penetrated the secret," says Celano. Prayer was to him the life of the soul. The soul that prays goes to the right place, and finds all its beauty. The soul that does not pray, keeps ever to the lower regions. Its divine part vegetates, and at length dies. S. Francis did not hesitate to say besides that there was no grace more desirable for a religious than that of prayer. He was convinced that without it there can be no progress in God's ways. For himself he had made it the centre of his life and his religious activity. Not only did he consecrate to it the living strength of his mind and heart, *totum cordis*, according to our Lord's recommendation, but he devoted to it the sum total of his time, *totum temporis*. Whether walking or sitting, working or resting, within and without, he prayed. Not indeed with a formal prayer, but with that general attitude of the soul which is the basis of prayer. God was continually present with him, and he was ever in God's presence. It was in a high degree the realisation of our Lord's words, I am in you, and you in Me.<sup>1</sup>

This general union, great as it was, did not satisfy Francis. There were times, and they were many, when he longed to turn more directly to God with all his faculties. He preferred to devote the night to this holy exercise, thus imitating our Lord, who, on the Galilean hills, so often in the night prayed for the world sleeping at His feet. Sometimes he associated his body with his soul. Then there arose between God and him a kind of animated dialogue. He spoke to his Lord, he sang His praises, he asked with tears and beating his breast, pardon for his sins and those of the world. More frequently he silenced all his senses, concentrated his faculties within, and, speechless and motionless, mounted to the throne of God. There he discerned those attributes of the Uncreated that more than all others put us in relation with Him. He

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cel. p. 197.

distinguished and adored in turn the Master, the Judge, the Father, the Friend, the Spouse. These varied aspects gave him an opportunity of employing all his resources. He drew from the treasure of his heart all that it contained. He offered successively the homage of the creature, the supplications of the sinner, the piety of the child, the tenderness of the friend, the affection of the spouse. And with what fervour and energy he put himself into these different states! It was more than a man praying, Celano says, it was prayer itself.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that God recompensed him by giving him a foretaste of the society and happiness of heaven. We have seen how, according to the opinion of his historians, Jesus, when appearing to him as a seraph, elevated his spirit to the seraphic life. Celano and S. Bonaventura repeat this assertion when speaking of his states of prayer. "His conversation," they say, "was in heaven. He became the fellow-citizen of the angels. He went through the mansions of the blessed. His soul, freed from earthly bonds, darted upwards to the summit of the City of God." In the two latter years of his life he had frequent raptures. "He was carried to the abodes where the celestial spirits live and sing, and in their society he presented himself to the Most Placid and Most Serene Lord of all things." Let no one ask for an exact interpretation of these sentences. Such things cannot be explained, S. Paul said, when he came down from the heights to which God had raised him. The reader has beneath his eyes the testimony of contemporaries faithfully recorded; he can only draw from it what it may please the divine light to show him.

After prayer, love. Love is the last step of the soul towards God, the one that completes the gift it makes of itself. Francis was full of this truth. He said: "We must love greatly the love that has loved us greatly;" and, "That is a noble prodigality which gives everything to God;" or, "That is a foolish avarice which refuses to give everything to God." We need not say that he was far removed from such avarice.

<sup>1</sup> Non tam orans quam oratio factus. (*Ibid.*)



He gave himself lavishly. S. Bonaventura says, "He was penetrated with the love of God as coal is penetrated by fire." "No one has loved as he did," says Celano. This love sprang from many sources. First of all from gratitude. This sentiment, which began in him very early, went on increasing with the divine benefits. He passed the two last years of his life in a continual act of thanksgiving. A few months before his death he composed his beautiful *Song of the Creatures*, which is an expression of thanksgiving put into the mouth of all creation. He animated his tenderness by the contemplation of the divine perfections. He was sensible of God, and quick in recognising His presence. He saw that God is worthy of all love, because of His infinite holiness and perfection, and who can say how far he carried this love. "He whom Thou didst so gloriously decorate with Thy wounds loved Thee much, O Jesus!" cries Celano. His love was not an indolent love made up of soft aspirations like ours. It was generous, unsatisfied, violent. Let not the admirers of the commonplace be scandalised. A love that leaves the soul at all times perfectly cool is not worthy of the name. In any case, the love of Francis was not of that kind, for he has explained himself on this point.

The song, part of which we are going to translate, is written in Italian. Its versification is too learned for it to have been constructed by S. Francis. But everyone agrees that, at least in substance, it sincerely reflects his habitual sentiments.

"Oh Love, for charity, why hast thou so wounded me? My heart is cleft in two, it burns with love.

It burns and flames, it finds no shelter, it cannot fly for it is bound.

It melts like wax before the fire, living it dies, and languishes all day.

It asks to fly, a moment only, and finds itself within a furnace.

Ah! whither am I dragged to such great anguish? To live like this is death, the heat is so intense.

Let no one blame me now, if love like this has made me mad. There is no heart that could defend itself or fly when taken by such love. Each one may wonder how a heart can suffer in such fire and not break. Would I could find a soul to understand me! One that had pity on my anguished heart!"

But the harmonious nature of Francis was opposed to excess of all kinds, and he begins to feel that he may have gone too far. He makes our Saviour Himself plead the cause of moderation in these terms :—

“Thou who lovest me, put order in thy love. There is no virtue without order. If thou desire so much to find Me, renew thy mind with virtue. In loving Me, I will that thou shouldst have an ordered charity. A tree is judged by order of its fruits, the proof that shows the value of all things.

All things created I have made with number, with measure, and an ordered end, and order keeps them in their harmony. Still more is charity well ordered in its nature. Why then from too great ardour, soul, art thou gone mad? Thou hast left the path of order, thy fervour is unbridled.”

The answer Francis gives is the most triumphant apology for the ardour of Divine love that we know. The author of the “*Imitation*,” in his immortal chapter on the effects of this love, has not attained to such enthusiasm.

“O Christ! thou hast stolen my heart and thou bidst me put order in my mind in loving. How, since I am all transformed in thee, can I remain the master of myself? As red-hot iron, as air the sun inflames lose all their form and take another shape, so is the soul in thee absorbed, O Love.

Why hast thou put me in this furnace, if thou dost will me to be temperate? When without measure thou gavest me thyself, I had no longer any measure left in me. Small, thou didst suffice me, I have no power to hold thee great. If fault there be 'tis thine, O Love, not mine, since thou hast made this path. Thou couldst not shield thyself from love. It brought thee down from heaven to earth. To such abasement, Love, thou didst descend, as one despised to wander in the world. Nor house nor land thou wouldst possess, such poverty was thine to make us rich. In life, in death, most truly thou hast shown the unmeasured love that burned within thy heart.

Thou wentest in the world like one inebriate, love led thee as a slave. In all things, thou O Love hast ever been unmindful of thyself. . . . Sure am I that thou didst not speak nor make excuse to Pilate that thou mightst close love's bargain on the cross.”

These strophes, expressing so close an intimacy with our Saviour, indicate another source of affection in Francis.

Though capable of adoring God in the majesty of heaven, he habitually sought Him nearer, in that human form which He took that He might the better be known by us. The Incarnation was to Francis, as it was to S. Paul, the great mystery of love in which God and man meet. It was the Divine Crucified One who, by word and example, had initiated him into life, and had, as it were, taken him by the hand to lead him to the Father. Francis read the Gospels very often, and he read them with spiritual eyes. His delicate imagination discovered in the Saviour's actions a number of beautiful details that escape the notice of those whose tenderness is less awakened. The whole life of Jesus thus displayed itself and became animated before him, and what an impression he received! Not only he repeated what those who have been near to the Saviour have always said: To whom else should we go? but all his admiration and tenderness seemed to him insufficient homage. He understood that our Lord, in taking our form and living our life, has thereby incited us to walk in His traces and imitate His example. The imitation of Christ, an imitation pushed to its furthest limits, seemed to him to be the law of the Christian life. At least he made it the law of his own life. Jesus had been poor; Francis wished to be poor. Jesus had brought the truth to men; Francis, notwithstanding his taste for solitude, wished to preach the truth to men. Jesus died to satisfy God and to save His brethren; Francis would willingly have given his life for the glory of God and the salvation of his brethren. Jesus had been the pattern, Francis was the perfect copy.

A hundred and sixty years later, a Minor named Bartolommeo of Pisa exaggerated this truth. In a famous book that he boldly called, "*The book of gold or of the conformity of Francis with Jesus Christ*," he established a close parallelism between our Saviour's life and that of the Saint. He tried to set forth that Jesus Christ performed no act that Francis did not reproduce exactly. Carried to such an exaggerated extent, the theory became intolerable, and

ended by shocking both history and piety. But its foundation is undeniable. It is true that, in following Jesus Christ step by step, Francis in some sort clothed himself with the person of the Saviour, according to S. Paul's expression. His contemporaries kept within reasonable bounds in speaking on this subject. Celano says, "Jesus was all things to him, Jesus was in his heart, Jesus was on his lips, Jesus was in his eyes, in his ears, in his hands. He was in his whole being." No one could express themselves better.

If Francis had his eyes fixed on the Saviour's whole life, yet his devotion selected by preference certain portions of that life. His preferences were those of solid minds. Amongst the mysteries, he loved all that relates to the Nativity, the Passion, the Holy Eucharist. We saw how he celebrated the feast of Christmas in the woods of Greccio. He could not always surround it with such pomp, but each year at its return he offered to God the sweet perfume of piety and gratitude. "It is the feast of feasts," he said. The Infant of Bethlehem seemed to him the love of God Himself made visible. He gave Him the name of Love in his poetic language. "Thou art born of love, not of the flesh, Thou art love made man to save men."<sup>1</sup> No one better than he has appreciated our Lord's words: "God so loved the world that He gave it His only Son." He desired to return love for love. The better to do so, he sometimes absorbed himself in silence and contemplation, at others he gave himself up to demonstrations of tenderness, and on those days he did not consider unseemly a kind of exuberance of joy. He thought that the earth ought to show by its gladness that it felt the dignity of the guest who had come to inhabit it. One year the feast of Christmas fell on a Friday, and they were asking at the Portiuncula whether they were to keep abstinence on such a great festival. Brother Morico maintained that they ought.

<sup>1</sup> "D'amore, non de carne, tu nascesti  
Humanato amore, che ne saluasse."

*Amor. de caritate, strophe 27.*



"First of all," said Francis, "it is a great sin to call the day on which our Lord was born, *Venerdi, Dies Veneris*. Then how can one think of abstinence in connection with such a great benediction? For my part, I wish the walls themselves could eat meat on that day, and if they cannot, I should like them at least to be rubbed with it." He desired, too, that in memory of the humble witnesses of our Saviour's birth, they should give all the oxen and asses better provender than usual on that festival. He carried this idea still further in imagination. "If ever I can speak to the emperor," he said, "I will beg him to make a universal edict, obliging all those who have the means to spread corn and grain along the roads, that the birds, especially our sisters the larks, should have a feast."

We can add little more to what has been already said about his devotion to our Lord's Passion, in speaking of his conversion and of the stigmata. No man in the whole Church was ever more closely united to this mystery than he was. "Francis lived at the foot of the Cross, by a continual remembrance," said the blessed Angela of Foligno. "After the Holy Virgin, after S. John," says Bartolommeo of Pisa, "he is the Saint who has had most sympathy in the sufferings of Jesus Christ." We may say that he knew, and would know, nothing but Jesus crucified. The cross taught him everything. In it, better than in any book, he read of the Redemption, of hope, of the glory of man. There also he read, in characters of fire, of love, the incomparable love of the Divine Victim. "I see," he said, "that Wisdom hid herself in this mystery. Love alone was seen. Power showed not herself for she had become ashamed. Great was that outpoured love. It was all love, both will and deed, love binding and embracing man from the cross."<sup>1</sup>

Francis was one of those thus bound, he could only exist at the side of the cross; there he poured out his sweetest and his most bitter tears; there he gave away his whole heart.

<sup>1</sup> *Amor, de caritate*, strophe 28.

To the Church's Office, which he recited as deacon and religious, he joined a special Office of the Passion, which he had composed and recited every day.

He who loves the cross must love the altar. There is the same Host, the same sacrifice, the same Saviour. The condescension which our Lord showed in extending the benefit of His Presence from one time to all times, and from one region to the entire world, was ever a wonder to S. Francis. He saw in it the last act of unbounded tenderness, and he wished that all Christians would come in crowds to place themselves at their Saviour's feet. It was one of his maxims, that not to hear Mass, every day if one can, is a mark of ingratitude and contempt. He usually heard two whenever his occupations permitted it. He composed a prayer for the moment of the Elevation, full of the idea of the mediation of our Lord. "Oh Heavenly Father, my Lord and my God, look upon the face of Thy Christ; have mercy upon me and upon all sinners for whom Thy Blessed Son our Lord deigned not only to die once, but to remain with us continually in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar for our salvation." Nor was the union of S. Francis with the Divine Victim a merely external one; he made a point of receiving Him often in Holy Communion, that he might participate more closely in His acts, and partake more fully of His grace. His brethren were struck with admiration at the devotion and respect which penetrated him at those times. His attitude, as well as the feelings expressed on his countenance, seemed to them entirely in accordance with the Sacrament in which Jesus Christ gives Himself to us as food.

Everything connected with this adorable Sacrament was an object of solicitude with him. We have seen how he revered the priests whose office it is to distribute it to men. He put his whole Order at their service, and he had nothing more at heart than to see them worthy of their sublime functions. "Listen," he wrote to those of the brethren who had entered the priesthood, "if we justly revere the Blessed

Virgin Mary because she bore the Son of God in her chaste womb ; if John the Baptist trembled before Jesus Christ and even when baptising Him dared not touch the top of His head ; if the sepulchre where He lay for a short time has a claim on our respect, what justice, what holiness, what merit must he have who touches Him with his hands, not in His mortal state, but such as He is in heaven, immortal, glorious, an object of contemplation to the angels !”

Such was his devotion to Jesus in the Sacrament, that for it he once forgot his beloved poverty, and gave orders that a certain number of the brethren should go about the world carrying precious *ciboria*. They were to leave one at every church where they found that “the price of our Redemption” was not reposing in a vessel worthy of Him. Doubtless the execution of this injunction was but imperfect. To make up for deficiencies, he had the idea of writing to all the clerics in the Catholic Church, “in all reverence, and kissing their feet.” “I pray,” he said, “all those who have charge of these most holy mysteries, to consider in their hearts in how many places they are unworthily received, indiscreetly administered, irreverently carried, in how many places the chalices are vile and utterly unworthy, as well as the corporals and linen which are used at the consecration of the body and blood of our Lord.” In this restoration of the Eucharistic devotion, he took a part most worthy of his faith. There is a tradition, that in most of his missions he carried a mould carefully engraved, with which he fashioned the wafers destined for the holy sacrifice.

The special love that he always had to France was strengthened by means of these ideas, for he said that the French greatly loved the body of our Lord. This predilection seemed to increase up to the end of his life. He repeated frequently that he would like to die in France, because there they treated holy things with respect.

After our Lord, his greatest love was for the Holy Virgin. “She has made the God of Majesty our brother,” he said. In his eyes that was a title to our entire gratitude and

homage. It would be difficult, says Celano, to tell the extent of the duties he rendered to her. He regarded her as his mother, and his tenderness to her had the charm of filial piety. One day at table, in the course of conversation, a brother said that the Holy Virgin was very poor when she gave our Lord to the world. It was enough for Francis. Great tears fell from his eyes ; he rose, and to be more like his Holy Mother, he went and finished his poor repast on the bare ground. He made her the Patroness of his Order. The older he grew, the more he loved to shelter under her maternal wing those whom he was going to leave behind, that she might protect them always. "That is our consolation and our hope," said Celano. "O sweet advocate of the poor, exercise thy office of guardian, guide us through all the time fixed by thy servant, our father."

He had also a great devotion to the Holy Angels, those first-born of creation. He looked upon them as our fellow-soldiers in the battle of life and our helpers in the midst of the shadows of death, and he said that no one should do in their presence anything that they would not dare to do in the sight of men. He believed that in church we sing the divine praises in their presence, and this was one reason why he required all the brethren to be in the chapel at Office and to sing it in a fitting manner. He gave special honour to S. Michael the Archangel, because it is he who presents souls to God. He said, "the dignity of this great prince is such, that everybody owes him a tribute of respect." In his honour he instituted a fast of forty days, between the Assumption and the 29th September.

Finally, he loved and venerated the Saints, especially S. John the Baptist, his patron, and those who, like the Apostles, had most love to our Lord. Amongst them, his greatest devotion was to SS. Peter and Paul, whom he regarded as the true Founders of the Church, and the models of the apostolic life. His spirit of true religion embraced all. One day at Monte Casale, in the province of Massa, he enjoined the brethren of the convent in that



town to go and search for relics in an abandoned church. "I have long suffered," he said, "from seeing those sacred bones deprived of the honour due to them. You must bring them to the chapel of your convent with all the respect you can." Having given this order, he went away on some business. Strange to say, the brethren forgot the injunction, and God Himself provided for the remains of His Saints. One day, on uncovering the altar, the brethren found these relics piously placed close to the door of the tabernacle. They exhaled a sweet perfume. On his return some time afterwards, Francis at once inquired about the relics. The brethren had at the same time to confess their negligence and to relate what God had done. "Blessed be the Lord my God," said Francis, "who has deigned to accomplish with His Divine hands the command I gave you." In consideration of the miracle, he pardoned the brethren, but not without imposing on them a penance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Celano, p. 260.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### HIS LOVE TO HIS NEIGHBOUR.

S. VINCENT of Paul, whose simple genius, nourished on the Gospels, agrees in more than one point with that of S. Francis, said of love to one's neighbour : " Give me a person who limits his love to God alone, a soul, if you will, brought up in contemplation, who, finding pleasure in this manner of loving God, and thinking Him the only one worth loving, stops to enjoy this source of infinite sweetness without troubling himself about his neighbour ; and give me another who loves God with his whole heart, and loves his neighbour also, though he be rough and imperfect, for the love of God, and who does all in his power to bring him to God : and then tell me, I pray you, which of these two loves is the most perfect and the least interested ? Without doubt the latter, which, joining the love of God with the love of the neighbour, or rather extending the love of God to the neighbour, and bringing the love of the neighbour to God, accomplishes the law more perfectly than the former."

Such was the avowed sentiment of Francis also. We have seen how he delighted to absorb himself in the contemplation of the divine perfections, but he did not stop there. The love of his neighbour seemed to him the continuation of love to God. " Jesus Christ," he said, " who is the Supreme Wisdom, did not remain alone in the bosom of the Father ; He came and put Himself amongst men to save them."<sup>1</sup> He would be a very imperfect disciple of the most loving Saviour who did not with all his soul love men with Him. Not only with Him, but like Him, as far as we are capable.

Some people imagine that the divine love quenches all

<sup>1</sup> S. Bon., p. 381.

other love. This is a great error. On the contrary, this love by its presence transforms and ennobles all inferior love. Let us look at the Saints, our masters and our models. They are said to have expended all their hearts in loving God, and no one has loved, venerated, helped man more than they have done. The two loves strengthen instead of destroying each other. It is the law.

This law was verified in Francis. He had a singular love to man, because he had a singular love to God. He gave the name of brother to all creatures, and what a brother he was to man! said Celano. He loved everything belonging to man. First their souls. "We do not love Jesus Christ if we do not love souls, for whom He gave His life," he said. Souls to him were his great attraction; we may say that he lived for them. "It was for them," said Celano, "that he wrestled with God in prayer, for them that he spent his strength in preaching, for them, in short, that he gave the example of heroism." He was always ready to give himself, to give everything, that they might be made beautiful with the beauty which God gives to those who are His. But while loving souls he was not indifferent to our other interests. He practised perfectly the Apostle's maxim, Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. He was indifferent to no true human interest. The glory of his country, the struggle for liberty, domestic happiness, the charms of poetry, cultivation of the mind, he understood it all, he took part in it according to his measure, and enjoyed it simply and sincerely. The monk and the Saint did not forget the citizen, the gentleman, nor even the troubadour.

More even than to what is pleasant in human life he was sensible to its sorrows. He did all that he could to raise and comfort those who had lost their share in the happiness of this world. In their aid he found and employed a power greater than his own. His miracles, like those in the Gospels, were very simple, and were miracles of kindness and compassion. He was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick.

His historians imply that he had the gift of gaining the hearts of sinners. He not only prayed for them, he knew how to speak to them. There is always some common ground between man and man. Francis was quick in discovering this ground and employing all his resources upon it. He was thoughtful, courteous, affectionate; he kept his saintliness in the background as long as it was necessary. "More saintly than the Saints when he was with them," says Celano, "in the midst of sinners he became like one of them." No one could better express the pliancy of a free soul, making itself all things to all men that it might gain the world to Jesus Christ. Such was the charity of S. Francis; it made him, in the fullest significance of the term, the neighbour of all men. To illustrate it, there is no need for us to repeat what we have already related, but we will record some fresh instances, showing towards whom he specially exercised this charity.

First: His love to his brethren. He began with them, according to the commandment. He liked to say that they belonged to him. God had given them to him, and he had received them with his whole heart. An indissoluble bond united him to them: their thoughts and acts in this world, in the other the eternal inheritance they had in common with each other. They formed one family, and his dearest wish was that they should have the spirit of a family. The life which they had chosen was in itself hard and full of privations. It would have been intolerable if wills were in opposition to each other, and therefore he desired that they should soften it as much as possible by a cheerful manner and Christian cordiality. There was to be no "mine" and "thine" amongst them. "I wish my brethren to behave as the sons of one mother," he said. "Tunics, cords, books, all we use, what pleases us most, let everything be at the disposition of those who need it." Also he wished them to be always ready to help one another. "Wherever the brethren may be," he wrote in his Rule, "in whatsoever place they may meet, let them not hesitate to make known their wants to



their brethren, for, if a mother loves and nourishes her son according to the flesh, much more should each one of us cherish and nourish his brother according to the spirit."

He himself gave the example of this charity. He was a tender father. How he considered his children! When he saw one of his first companions, his countenance lighted up, his face took an angelic expression. He had always this paternal regard for his sons. He gave them all he had, his time, his intelligence, above all, his heart. He placed his power with God at their service, for he did not think his own devotion to them sufficient; he called to his aid that First Fatherhood from whence all other fatherhood is derived. "He raised pure hands to heaven," Celano says. "Prostrate in spirit before the Infinite Majesty, he offered himself in sacrifice for his brethren: he constrained God to pour on them His benefits and graces. He put their salvation before his own. Each one of them cost him more efforts and groans than it cost his mother to bring him into the world."

His solicitude was shown first of all to those who were suffering trials, and amongst them those who were afflicted with some disease of the mind. Let not the reader take this expression, disease of the mind, as being something peculiar to the monastic life. Everyone knows by experience that life does not go on in a regular and peaceful course. It meets with impediments, troubles, uncertainty, depression. These crises are in themselves diseases, and sometimes very serious ones. More than others, religious, who are constantly face to face with themselves and striving for a higher ideal, and hence are more open to the attacks of the enemy, become liable to these wounds and weaknesses. Francis had too much knowledge of the human heart to ignore the fact, and he felt that to aid his brethren in these trials was the most delicate part of his ministry. He employed in it all his kindness, tenderness, and natural and supernatural intuition. The brethren came from all sides to open their hearts to him, knowing that they would be received with the

truest compassion, and often be cured by mere contact with his virtue. He was in the midst of them as their hope and refuge. Here is an example amongst others we have already reported, showing him in this character. One of the brethren was suffering from a spiritual temptation, of the kind which is often more terrible, says Celano, than temptations of the flesh. Having tried in vain to overcome it, he thought that Francis alone was capable of delivering him. He came weeping and threw himself at his feet without being able to pronounce a word; sobs stifled his voice. Francis, seeing him in this condition, read what was in his mind, and shuddered at the thought of what he must be suffering. "Wicked devils," he cried, "I command you to cease your attacks against my brother." The brother immediately recovered his peace, and it was not again disturbed.

From the first beginning of the Order he gave the tenderest care to the sick. He reserved for them all the best things, and, when necessary, went himself to beg for more delicate food for them. A tender mother could not have shown them more attention than he did. Perhaps in later years he may have moderated this solicitude a little. The brethren had become accustomed to his indulgence, and many had even begun to be more exacting than was suitable. Francis was obliged to recall them to a spirit of greater endurance. He reminded them that they were poor, that the poor cannot have everything, and therefore they would be wrong to complain if they did not have exactly what they desired brought to them. He expressed his definite opinion in two of his rules. "If a brother should fall sick in any place whatever, the other brethren must not leave him till they have placed with him one or more brethren according to his needs to serve him; and let these serve him as they would be served themselves." So far for kindness, now for the spiritual side, for the time of sickness was to be sanctified like other seasons. "I pray my sick brethren not to be troubled in their infirmities, nor to be irritated against

God, nor against their brethren. Let them ask for remedies without impatience ; nor let them have an inordinate desire of curing the body, which must soon die, and which is the enemy of the soul. Let them rather give thanks to God, for their sufferings are the effect of God's Divine predestination of them. Is it not written, ' Whom I love I correct and chasten ? ' ”<sup>1</sup>

We have seen the fine example that was given by the first Minors under the guidance of such a father. They renewed the best days of piety and fervour. All who cared for their salvation were invincibly attracted ; they came in crowds. At the time of the Chapter of Mats, there were more than five thousand brethren. There were soon twice or perhaps three times as many. But this success was the cause of misfortune. It became impossible to superintend such a multitude with all the necessary care, and Francis was aware of it. “ There are too many Minors,” he said very soon. But neither his warnings nor the institution of the Third Order could stop the movement. Vocations continued to flow in. They were received, and what might have been expected came to pass—the brethren no longer walked together in perfect order. Some, the greater number, remained faithful to the primitive spirit, and gave the holiest examples. Others became languid, or were troubled by their passions. Francis found that the increase of superiors had not added to the quality of the family nor to the satisfaction of its head. He had to act, and it was a delicate matter. He saw before him virtuous brethren, and others who were deficient or wholly wanting in virtue, and he had to consider the best method of dealing with both parties.

With the good he was lenient. As the attributes of the Divine Nature, goodness, fatherly love, inexhaustible generosity, are in a measure called into action by the just and are shown towards them with greater splendour, so did the pure nature of S. Francis expand and give itself out joyfully to

<sup>1</sup> The rule from which this passage is extracted no longer exists. It is Celano who cites it.

those who responded the best to his desires. Not that even with them his tenderness was ever weak or soft ; each day, and at every moment, his historian says, he made a severe inspection of his sons, and allowed no imperfection to remain in their hearts ; he noticed the slightest negligence. Moreover, he liked to give them opportunities for putting forth all their good will ; he feared neither work, nor effort, nor sacrifice for them ; he knew that at that price must all moral beauty be paid for, and he wished his children to be beautiful and lovable in the sight of God. In a word, he, a Saint himself, was occupied with the task of making other men Saints. But when a brother had courageously entered upon the straight path, and he saw unmistakable signs that he would become a good and faithful servant of his Lord, then he loved him and feared not to let him know it.

Our readers already know Brother Leo, whom Francis called God's little lamb. Leo had the innocence of the lamb, but he had also something of its timidity. We know the cause of this timidity. Sometimes it was the shadow of a troubled thought passing over the pure surface of his mind which gave him alarm. We saw one example of it at La Vernia. At other times the poor little lamb was confused between good and better, and lost all his interior liberty, and feared to take one step further. He was doubtless in one of these anxious states when he received the following beautiful note : " Brother Leo, thy brother Francis gives thee salutation and peace. I call thee my son, as a mother, and all we have said in walking together, I condense in this word and counsel. In whatsoever manner thou canst please the Lord God and follow in His footsteps and His poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and in obedience to me. And if it be necessary to thee for thy soul, or any other consolation to thee, and thou desire to come to me, my Leo, come. Farewell in Christ." What a sweet application of the saying : Love God, and do what you please !

Brother Egidius was very different from Brother Leo. His was a free, bold spirit, which would soon have found the



interior of a convent too narrow, and its occupations too monotonous. Francis loved him for the strong religious bent of his mind. He thought he might safely be left to the inspirations of grace, and he allowed him to lead the life of a knight-errant. Brother Egidius was never attached to any special convent. He justified this confidence. His beatification by the Church is a proof that he lost nothing in his wanderings, neither his time nor his virtue.

After seeing what entire faith Francis had in his brethren, we can easily understand his condescension in the following instances: Towards the end of his life, those who had not yet seen him burned with the desire to behold him and to be blessed by him. They asked as a recompense, after having worked harder than usual, to be allowed to make the pilgrimage to Assisi. Many came from great distances to give themselves this consolation. Two of them, men known for their virtue, one day went to Grecio with this idea. Unfortunately, it happened to be a day that Francis devoted entirely to meditation. On these occasions it was forbidden to disturb him. The poor brethren thought that God had not approved of their undertaking, and were going back sad and resigned. We do not know how Francis was informed of what was going on, but they had not gone a stone's throw when the Saint appeared at the window of his cell. "Look at me," he cried to them. They looked, and he gave them his blessing. Their desires were fulfilled; to see him and be blessed by him was all they wanted. The face of their father framed in the little window, with his hand raised to bless them, was a beautiful vision that they would never forget.

Two other brethren who came from France had a still greater happiness. They had met the Saint before they arrived at the Portiuncula, and the conversation had been affectionate and unrestrained. One of the two, finding Francis so accessible, ventured to express an indiscreet wish. He asked him if he would not give him his tunic. "Willingly, my brother," replied Francis, "on condition that you give me

yours." They undressed themselves on the spot, and the exchange was made. The brother was full of joy ; he thought he had his father close to him when he was wearing his garment. As to Francis, says Celano, he would have given still more, he would have given himself.

With the wicked the scene is changed. Francis becomes quite different. He appears troubled and agitated. It is the inevitable effect of evil. It changes all those who have to repress it. In a mysterious way it may be said even to affect God Himself. The Psalmist said, "Lord with the perverse Thou seemest perverse." And Tertullian with equal boldness says, "God is very good by nature ; He becomes just and rigorous by our act."

Francis used the method employed by all true superiors ; he tried to prevent faults. His representations of vice were calculated to inspire a horror of it. He knew how to show it in all its deformity. There were three vices against which he never ceased uplifting his voice. He did not select them by chance ; they are those which, by their contagion, most profoundly trouble the life of a community—idleness, detraction, and bad example. Of idleness he said that for all men it is a source of vice, because it quickly opens the heart to all unhealthy thoughts, and loosens the tongue for vain or wicked words. He added that for Minors it is an injustice and an impudence : an injustice, because in begging for everything they wrong the poor, and are a burden on the rich ; an impudence, because for a man who most probably could not have lived at home without labour, it is impudent to live in a convent on the labour of his brethren who are as poor as he.

He dreaded detraction even more than idleness. He looked upon detractors as idle hypocrites, as dangerous beings. They are idle, he said, and they know it. This is what they think in their hearts : "I am wanting in good qualities, I have no science nor anything to recommend me ; there is no place for me either with God or with men ; I know what I will do. Instead of acquiring what I lack, I

will disparage the best ; perhaps in that way I shall gain importance in the eyes of my superior. After all, he is a man, and I sometimes see him do what I do myself ; he cuts down the cedars that he the little bramble may be visible in the forest." They are hypocrites also. They pretend to be good and zealous, and they are not so ; they reprove the faults of others, and do not correct their own ; they wish to be taken for Saints, and they have neither the soul nor do they do the works of Saints. Look at them ! They praise those who are in high places, and they praise them only in hopes they may hear of it. Finally, they are dangerous. Without honesty themselves, they only live by attacking the honesty of others. Like the serpent, they have poison under their tongue, and they poison a whole community. They are the scourge and the shame of religion.

Those who wounded him most were undeniably those who caused scandal. "They transpierce me with a sword which they turn round and round in the wound," he said. He believed firmly that his work had arisen from God, and his great fear was that bad examples should make it appear unworthy of its high origin. He once made this touching prayer before the assembled brethren, with tears in his eyes and his arms extended like a cross : "Lord Jesus, who chose the Apostles as preachers of the Holy Gospel, faithful to Thy former mercies Thou hast planted this Religion in Thy Church, for the strengthening of faith and the accomplishment of Thy designs. Who, then, can give satisfaction for its members, if by unfaithfulness to their vocation they show only works of darkness unto the world" ; and he added, in a kind of transport, "Ah ! may those who, by their examples, destroy what Thou hast built and art still building by our holy brethren, be cursed by Thee, O most holy Saviour, by all the court of heaven, and by me Thy little servant." Another time he said still more sadly, "The examples of the wicked fall back upon the good. A day will come when this Religion, so beloved of God, will be so much defamed, that we shall no longer dare to appear in

public. Then those who join the Order will indeed be led by the Holy Spirit, flesh and blood will have no part in their act, they will be blessed of God."

Alas! these cries, these warnings and severities, did not prevent the evil from appearing. The tares were already mingled with the wheat when Francis uttered them; it only remained for him to decide on the attitude he should take towards these degenerate brethren. At first he seems to have inclined towards severity. His vivacious, energetic nature at the first impulse led him to it, and at that time he had for vicar Peter Catani, whose genial character allowed the reins to be somewhat slackened. Francis saw that it was necessary to uphold discipline with a strong hand. One day he heard a brother disparaging another, and he cried with a terrible voice, "The Order is in danger if we do not bar every opening to detractors; they would soon infect us all with their venom. Rise," he said to his vicar, "and examine the case carefully, and if the accused is innocent, make an example that they will remember. Chastise the accuser." Then he added, perhaps with a smile at the idea, "If thou canst not chastise him thyself, send for a Florentine boxer, and put him in his hands. Thou and the ministers must, at all costs, hinder this plague from spreading."

Notwithstanding this instance, which, besides, is unique, Francis knew better than anyone that punishments, though sometimes necessary, are rarely a remedy. They arrest a soul rather than convert it. But it was the conversion of the brethren he desired, and so, after a short experience, he came back to the qualities which alone have the power of changing hearts, kindness, and compassion. He was still more established in this disposition when Brother Elias succeeded Peter Catani. Elias was the opposite to his predecessor; he had a hard, despotic soul. The law, whatever it might be, for him was law; he punished any infraction of it with merciless rigour. Francis saw that authority exercised in this manner, and falling on the brethren like a thunderbolt,



would soon compromise everything. He came forward at once to obviate such a misfortune. The letters that he wrote one after another on this occasion exhale the sweet perfume of the Gospel. We will translate the two first.

*"To the reverend Father in Christ, Brother Elias, Vicar of the whole Order, Brother Francis, salutation in Jesus Christ.*

"My Brother, may the Lord give thee His holy benediction. Be patient and well disposed in all things. If thy brethren offend thee in anything, offer the offence to God. By this I shall know that thou art a servant of God, if by thy mercy thou bring back to God a brother who has strayed, and if though he have erred greatly, thou continuest to love him. And if through any human fear, he dares not address thee, seek from himself whether he desires mercy. And if by the persuasion of the devil, any brother fall into grievous sin, let him have recourse to the guardian, and let the guardian send him to the provincial, who shall receive him mercifully, and if he sees that he is contrite shall say to him, Go and sin no more. Farewell in the Lord."

*"To the reverend Father in Christ, Brother Elias, Vicar of the whole Order, Brother Francis, salutation in Jesus Christ.*

"In all that thou doest, Brother Elias, I recommend thee most of all charity and patience, for it behoves thee to tolerate many, and the burden which rests on thy shoulders is great and heavy, namely, the souls of a great multitude. Now, under the old law, the High Priest bore on the rational of judgment, which hung from his shoulders upon his breast, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, signifying thereby that a prelate must bear in his heart those subordinates whom he bears on his shoulders, for he would not be able to tolerate those whom he had ceased to love. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He wished to give His Church to Peter, before He handed over his sheep to Him, examined him in love. See then that no brother falls into sin, but if one should sin let him not depart from before thy face without mercy and correction, and since thou art a physician, offer medicine to the sick, for the Lord said: 'They that are

whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.' Watch, warn, labour, feed, love, wait, fear. Farewell in the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

There is a powerful attraction that draws into sin those who have made a vow to avoid it. Charity does not triumph over all weakness, and there were some of the brethren who fell short of their vocation. There were even scandals, and fallings away in the midst of the flock. At times Francis considered his work, or rather God's work, which had cost him so much labour, compromised, and his soul was oppressed and overwhelmed at the thought. He may have felt this grief unduly, for one day when he was pouring out his troubles to God, an internal voice said to him: "Little man that thou art, wherefore art thou thus troubled; knowest thou not that while making thee the shepherd of my Order, I have remained its principal protector? If those whom I have called fail, I will put others in their place; if they are not yet born, I will make them to be born. The Order shall live even though it were reduced to three people. Therefore work out thy salvation tranquilly." These words comforted Francis: after hearing them he used to say, that "as a sunbeam chases away the thick darkness, so does the light of one holy man surmount the darkness of a number of imperfect ones," and for some time it was a consolation to him.

Second: His love for the poor. After his family, there was no one whom Francis loved more than the poor. They were his brethren also. They were living in the state which he had embraced. They had even the advantage of being in that state by the order or the permission of God Himself. Francis seems to have esteemed poverty for itself. He did not seek out its causes, he did not ask if it was the result of vice or of improvidence, or whether it had fallen upon an unfortunate person by a series of inevitable catastrophes. In a poor man he saw the image and re-

<sup>1</sup> The last words of this letter are noticeable: *Vigila, admone, labora, pasce, ama, expecta, time*. There is a whole treatise of education in these seven words. A man has reflected much when he is able to comprise a great subject in a few words.

presentative of Jesus Christ, and he asked no further, all his compassion, respect, and tenderness were at once enlisted.

The brethren could not so easily enter into this canonisation of all poverty. They, like ourselves, were inclined to distinguish between one kind of poor and another. Thus a brother who accompanied Francis said one day to a poor man who begged of him: "You look to me like an impostor." Hearing these words, Francis was much troubled. He sharply reproved the brother, then he ordered him to take off his tunic and ask pardon of the poor man, prostrating himself before him. "To curse a poor man," he said, "is to insult Jesus Christ whose noble image he bears. Another time, the brother who accompanied him was still more rash. They met a beggar whose languid countenance indicated bad health. "Poor and sick," said Francis. The unfortunate man seemed to him doubly to be pitied, and he discoursed compassionately on his sad lot. The companion could not help pointing out what was wanting in his condition, that is to say, his voluntary acceptance of it in the manner of the Minors. "Doubtless he is poor," he said, "but in his thoughts and in his heart perhaps there is no one richer in all the province." This rash judgment wounded Francis to the quick. "What is that thou sayest?" he cried. The brother acknowledged that he had spoken hastily, but Francis would not pardon him. "Make haste," he said, "take off thy tunic and prostrate thyself before that poor man, confess thy sin, and ask him not only to forgive thee, but to pray for thee." When the brother came back to him, he said, "My brother, the sight of a poor man is an apparition of Jesus Christ and His poverty, and in the infirmity of our brethren we must see the infirmities that Jesus Christ took upon Himself to save us." This was the way with the servant of God, says Celano, he had his eyes always fixed on the face of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, he took pains that the poor should bear within the likeness that they bore externally. One day at Colle, in the province of Perugia, he met a poor man whom he

had known when he was in the world. "My brother," he said, "how art thou?" The man was full of bitterness because the lord of the place had stripped him of everything he possessed. He answered, "I am very bad, thanks to my master, whom may Almighty God curse." Moved at this bad feeling, even more than by his misery, Francis replied: "My brother, for the love of God pardon thy master. If thou pardon him not, thou hast lost thy possessions, and thou wilt lose thy soul besides." "No," said the other, "I will never pardon him unless he gives me back what he has stolen from me." Francis considered for a moment what to do, then he said: "My brother, I will give you the cloak that I am wearing, but I pray thee for the love of God, pardon thy master." The poor man accepted, he took the cloak and declared that he pardoned the lord.

Since the poor represent Jesus Christ, Francis desired to treat them as he would have treated our Lord in person. He showed them all kinds of attention. For example, he was glad to meet them on the road, and he addressed them always with words of respect and sympathy. That alone would be considered a great deal by those who know how sensible the unfortunate are to anything that cheers them; but he did not stop there. He felt bound to aid them, and, if necessary, he gave himself to them. Many times he offered his feeble shoulders when he saw them bending under a burden of faggots. Oftener still he gave them his clothes, when his personal assistance would have been of no use to them. In extreme cases he gave everything he had on, in ordinary cases he gave his cloak. This cloak became the habitual instrument of his liberality. He gave it away so often, that he made use of it in place of money. We can see how inconvenient such money was. Outraged political economy took its revenge. Francis did not care. He did what he could. In place of money, which he had repudiated, he thought himself fortunate to have a cloak at hand. The poor seem always to have received it with joy, a proof that it was worth something;



but on the other hand, the transaction became a cause of complaint.

His benefactors were the first to uplift their voice. They said they had given, or rather lent him, this garment, to preserve him from the inclemency of the weather, and they were sorry to see that he deprived himself of it to give it to others on the first occasion. To obviate their complaints, Francis made his own conditions. He stipulated, 1st, that he should never give back the cloak they offered him ; 2nd, that he was to be free to give it away if he met some one who wanted it more than he did. When once this arrangement had been made, he considered the matter settled, and would not hear of any objections. One day, returning from Siena, he met a poor, ill-clothed man. "My brother," he said, "my cloak belongs to this poor man, we must give it back to him. It has only been lent to us till we found some one in greater need than ourselves." The companion resisted, feeling sure that Francis ought to have the protection of the cloak, but the Saint kept to his point : "I will not be a thief," he exclaimed ; "we should be robbing the great Almoner of heaven if we did not give to one who is more in want than we are." Vanquished by this argument, the brother did not reply, and the cloak was given.

The brethren, on their side, were anxious for the health of their father, with these continual changes of clothing. They procured a cloak for him themselves, and when they gave it him they forbade him to dispose of it in any manner whatever. They were out in their reckoning if they thought they could stop the liberality of Francis by this method. His mind was fertile in resources. Once, by a sort of coaxing, he came over the guardian charged with his oversight. It was at Rieti ; he had met a poor woman who, like himself, had come to the town to have advice for her eyes. He put on his most insinuating tone of voice : "Brother Guardian," he said, "we must give back what is not ours." The guardian replied, "Yes, father, if we have anything that does not belong to us, we must return it."

"This cloak," continued Francis; "we have borrowed it from this poor woman and we must return it to her, since we have nothing in our purse that we can give her." "My brother," said the guardian, "the cloak is mine, no one has lent it to us; use it as much as you please, or give it back to me." Francis would not be beaten. "Brother Guardian," he said, in his sweetest voice, "thou hast always been courteous to me, be so this once again." The guardian could not resist any longer. He said to Francis: "Do, father, what the Spirit of the Lord inspires you to do."

Another time he obtained his end in a more questionable manner. A poor man came to him weeping to beg for alms; his wife, he said, was just dead, his little children were in distress. Francis was touched to the heart. He dared not give anything directly, but he said to the man: "Take this cloak, and do not let it go if anyone wants to take it from you; do not give it up unless they pay well for it." The brothers soon came up, but it was vain for them to claim what they said was their property; the poor man, backed up by the connivance of Francis, defended with all his might what he had got possession of. The brethren had to resign themselves to redeeming the cloak.

Childish stratagems! people may say. Perhaps they were, but let no one mistake them; only such hearts as cannot refrain from the divine joy of giving, ever employ the like artifices. Moreover, God glorified the magnanimity of Francis by frequently lending him His power. A number, perhaps the greater number, of the Saint's miracles, either during his life or after his death, were performed at the request of the poor and in their behalf. Men, too, have recompensed him after their manner; they have named him "the father and the patriarch of the poor," though he was poor himself. Posterity can only ratify this eulogy.

Third: His love to his benefactors. After his own people, and after the poor, Francis showed his warmth of heart to

his benefactors especially. The sense of justice which was very strong in him, and which forms so great a part of gratitude, made this virtue natural to him. Then it is true that he had the good fortune to find many and powerful benefactors. One of them especially surpassed all the others by his high rank and his unceasing devotion. This was Cardinal Ugolino, the officially declared protector of the Order. We have already several times spoken of this eminent man, but here we will detail more fully the care that he bestowed upon the work of S. Francis. This he did so thoroughly, that we ask ourselves whether the work could have developed to such an extent as it did without this assistance. He saw from the first that it brought to the Church unexpected and much-needed assistance. He defended it against those who would have stifled it at its birth, and, says Celano, they were many. He made use of his personal authority, and the authority given him by the Sovereign Pontiff, to propagate it in the world. We can form an idea of the part he took in it when we say that, under the Pontificate of Honorius alone, there were more than thirty letters or Pontifical briefs in favour of the new Order, doubtless for the most part attributable to him.<sup>1</sup> It was a daily solicitude. For the person of the holy Founder he had the greatest admiration; he regarded him as a man raised up by God, as the equal of the prophets and the apostles. He was not afraid to rank himself amongst his disciples, and to walk beside him, bare-footed, clothed in serge, and girt with a cord. He believed he was performing God's will in undertaking the arrangement of some of his writings, and in being the executor of his desires. More than once, this prince of the Church, this venerable octogenarian, was found reverently kissing the hand of his young friend. What a fine example of Christian con-

<sup>1</sup> After he became Pope, his intervention was still more active. In the Franciscan collection of Bulls there are more than three hundred of his acts in connection, more or less directly, with the Minors. There is about the same number in the Dominican collection. Nothing more is needed to show to what a point the Pontiff depended on the Mendicant Orders.

descension. Authority is honoured when it thus bends to put itself at the service of just ideas !

Our knowledge of Francis enables us to imagine how greatly he appreciated this affectionate patronage. He always spoke of the Cardinal in terms of respect and admiration. He called him his father, and truly, says Celano, he reposed on the bosom of his clemency as an infant sleeps upon its mother's breast. He professed submission to him in all things. When writing to him about the affairs of the Order, he put the prophetic superscription, "To the very reverend Lord Ugolino, Bishop of the whole world," as though he were already Sovereign Pontiff. In short, he gave him all that was in his power. If he saw that he was sad or fatigued with the cares of his office, he made use of that liberty of a child that was permitted to him to try and comfort him. In this he succeeded so well that the Cardinal avowed he had never had a trouble or affliction that could resist a quarter of an hour's conversation with Francis.

Francis infused this gratitude in the hearts of his disciples. We have said several times that Thomas of Celano, who lived with him, is a faithful echo of his sentiments. This excellent historian is eloquent on Cardinal Ugolino. "He was," he says, "the rampart of the Church at this epoch ; a river of eloquence flowed from his lips ; he was trained in all kinds of affairs, and no one could resist him. How many adversaries of the truth he has confounded ! How many enemies of the Cross of Christ he has cast into the shade ! How many wanderers he has brought back into the right way ! How many hearts divided by strife he has re-united ! To us he was a true pastor, though he always left the name of pastor to Francis. Our beloved father saw what was necessary for us, but it was this powerful lord who put his thoughts into execution. Blessed be the day when, by divine inspiration, our Order was given into his hands."

It was not necessary to have rendered such great services to Francis to have a claim on his gratitude. For instance,



he had the following graceful custom : When a woman had given him one or more of her children, he called her his mother. She has given us a brother, he said, is she not our mother? And with him this was no empty word. He treated all these mothers with the greatest consideration, and they knew it and applied to him without difficulty. One of them, who had fallen into destitution, came and told him of her trouble. He listened with marked sympathy, then turning to Peter Catani, he said, "Cannot we do something for our mother?" He replied, "I do not see what we can give her. There is, indeed, a manuscript of the New Testament that is worth something, but it is the only one we have, and we want it for the lessons at matins, since we have no breviaries." Francis considered for a moment, then he said, "Give the New Testament to our mother, and let her sell it to supply her wants, for one of the truths it has taught us is, that we must supply the wants of the poor. I feel certain that God will be more pleased with this sacrifice than with all the lessons that we could read." This, says Celano, was the fate of the first New Testament that entered the Order ; it served as a victim to the piety of Francis.

Even a passing service he would not willingly leave unrecompensed, especially if the service was rendered with Christian delicacy. Under these conditions he performed the first of his miracles that may be called miracles of charity. It was at a place called Toscanella, where he was preaching a mission. He had received the kindest hospitality from a nobleman in the little town. This good man had an only son, so crippled in all his members, that he was still lying in a cradle, though he had long passed the age when children begin to walk. Towards the end of the mission the populace began to proclaim Francis as a Saint, and the father thought that he might obtain the cure of his son. He threw himself at the Saint's feet, and besought him with tears to have compassion on his misfortune. Francis began by protesting that he was far from having the power they attributed to him. "I am only an unprofitable servant," he said. But soon his sense

of gratitude, as well as the entreaties of the unfortunate father, prevailed on him, and he consented to pray. On rising from his knees he was full of confidence. He laid his hand on the child and blessed him, and then took him by the hand to help him to get up. The child for a moment stood upright on his feet, and then began to run about the house. All present were filled with admiration, and the good parents, at the height of happiness, did not know how to thank their guest, beloved of God, who had brought them such a benefit.

At Rieti, in very much the same circumstances, he did a thing, less wonderful indeed, but perhaps showing even more his natural courtesy and politeness. He had gone to that town on account of his eyes, as we shall presently relate. The doctor had received him well. He visited him every day and was most attentive to him. Francis was much touched by his devotion. "We must invite him to dinner," he said to the brethren at the convent, "and give him a good repast." The guardian replied: "My father, we are very sorry, but it is difficult for us to invite any one, we have so little of everything." Francis, a little annoyed, answered: "Why must I repeat the same thing to you twice?" Then the oculist, who was present, said pleasantly to the brethren: "But my dear brothers I shall be quite happy to share in your penury." No further objection could be made; the brethren would do their best. They took from the store closet a little bread and some remains of wine, the cook prepared a dish of vegetables, and that was all they could find; it would not be a meal such as Francis would have wished to provide. But unexpected assistance was sent to the poor men's table. Some one knocked at the door of the monastery; it was a woman bringing a basket; the basket contained some fine grapes, a honeycomb, and underneath, a loaf of white bread, some shell and other fish. There was great surprise and joy amongst the brethren. They removed the poor pittance they had placed on the table. "We will eat it to-morrow," they said, and they served up

the things that had been brought for the feast. Francis was happy in presiding over it, and by his cheerfulness, gracious manners, and pleasant conversation, added considerably to the enjoyment. The doctor was charmed ; he said to the brethren when he took leave : " Neither you my brothers, nor we laymen, know all the sanctity of this man."

## CHAPTER XX.

### HIS LOVE OF NATURE.

AFTER God, men ; after men, nature. Francis knew the distance that separates these terms, but he did not think there was an abyss between them that could not be crossed. He linked them together in his mind and in his affection, as they are linked in reality and in life.

This affection was at first only a good instinct due to a fine and delicate organisation. As a child, his face used to light up at the sight of flowers, he delighted to inhale their perfume. As a young man, he was, as we have said, most sensible to the beauty of the world. A fine view, luxuriant vegetation, the play of light and shade, the unceasing movement and flow of water, all such things he appreciated and loved. In later years, and when far advanced in the way of holiness, he did not change in this respect. Nature was to him always a friend. He not only felt no fear of her, he regarded intimacy with her as beneficial. He found in her a support, and, more than that, she gave him wings for his piety. His historians, by their abundant details, have enabled us to follow these motions of his soul.

S. Bonaventura says, that going back to the first origin of things, Francis considered all creatures as having come from the paternal bosom of God. This common origin sufficed in his eyes to form a true fraternity amongst them all. "They have the same principle as we," he said. "Like us they have the life of thought, of choice, of love of the Creator." He accepted literally what seemed to him the consequence of this truth. Quite seriously he spoke of : our brother the fire, our little brothers the lambs, our sister the water, our little sisters the larks. And in these expressions he put a



sort of piety. In hearing him proclaim that parentage, people felt that at the moment he united himself to the great Source of all things. Needless to say how this conviction made him regard all creatures. He would not have hurt the smallest of them, nor would he suffer anyone to hurt them. "O simple piety, O pious simplicity!" Celano exclaims. He would not crush the worms that he found on his path. He carried them carefully to the side of the road, lest they should be trampled on by the foot of a less considerate traveller. Even with insensible things, it seemed to him an intolerable thing to destroy their life. When the brethren went to the forest to cut wood he recommended them to take care of the roots, that the trunks might sprout and live, thanks to this precaution.

Not to hurt our humble brothers, this he believed was our first duty towards them, but to stop there would be to misunderstand the designs of Providence. We have a higher mission. God wills us to assist them whenever they require our aid. The servant of Jesus Christ was careful not to neglect this order. We know that in long winters bees sometimes exhaust their store of provisions and die of hunger if left to themselves. Francis would have blamed himself if he had forgotten them in their extremity. He was even lavish to these industrious creatures. He who had nothing of his own managed to find honey and even good wine for them. He gave it all joyfully to them, to warm and comfort them, he said.

Any creature in distress had a claim on his protection. One day, on the road to Siena, he met a young man carrying some live turtle doves that he had caught, and was going to sell. "O good young man," he said to him, "these are innocent birds that are compared in Holy Scripture to chaste and faithful souls. I pray you not to give them over to those who will kill them, but give them to me." They were given to him, and the Saint put them in his bosom, and said as he caressed them: "O my sisters the turtle doves, so simple, innocent, and chaste, why did you let yourselves be

taken? Now I will save you from death, and make nests for you, that you may bring up your young and multiply according to the commandment of our Creator." He kept his word and made nests for them, and they became tame and laid their eggs and hatched them under the care of the brethren, as hens would have done. They would not go away till Francis gave them his benediction and leave to depart.<sup>1</sup>

Such interventions as this were necessarily rare, but the attention that he gave to all creatures was an everyday thing with the Saint. He disdained nothing. He liked to see them all ; they were a constant source of pleasure to him. He was proud of their good qualities, and he became acquainted with them by close study of their nature, which he was able to penetrate by special light—the light of a Saint, Celano says ; and when he had discovered them, he boasted of them as he might of the qualities of a brother or a sister. He did not hesitate occasionally to spend a whole day in such praises. He often returned, and always with great delight, to the subject of the wonderful industry of bees. Beautiful things filled him with admiration. Our Lord said that Solomon in all his glory was never clothed like the lily of the field, and Francis with all his heart believed in this superiority of natural over artificial beauty. Flowers always had the power of enchanting him. He could hardly ever see a bed of them without approaching and inviting them to praise their Creator. According to his historians, his rapture became ineffable when he contemplated the sun, moon, stars, and firmament. There he found one of the clearest revelations of Infinite Beauty ; it seemed to him as though all these heavenly bodies cried out, He who made us is very good.

Here we must pause a moment to remark on this expression. It reveals a new side in the mind of S. Francis. For him the creatures not only came from God, they were besides

<sup>1</sup> This anecdote is not related by the historians of S. Francis ; it is taken from the "*Fioretti*," chap. xxii.

His representations and images. True it is that properly speaking it is in the face of man that the *light of the divine countenance* appears and shines ; but this celestial light is not entirely wanting in the inferior creatures. They are smaller images, though in their measure they are faithful ones also. Thus all creation became in his eyes a divine poem in which the Creator has written something of Himself, and this poem lies open before men. To read it, all that is necessary is a pure heart. Francis always recommended it to his disciples. He wished, as we have before mentioned, that they should always have a beautiful fragment of it before their eyes. The border of the great garden was sown by his orders with grass, sprinkled with daisies. A little garden was made within the great one, and set apart for the culture of bright-coloured, sweet-smelling flowers. "The grass was to remind the brethren of the beauty of the Father of the world ; the flowers were to give them a foretaste of the eternal sweetness of heaven." As well as speaking to him of God, nature spoke to him also of His Son Jesus Christ. In fact, by the Incarnation, our Lord not only approached man, He entered into relationship with the creatures also. He made use of them notably to show the different states through which He would pass. For example, when announcing by His prophet the abasement to which He was to be reduced by His sufferings, He said : I am a worm and no man. By this designation the worm has received a dignity which it had not before ; our Lord has condescended to use it as an image of Himself. He said again : I am the light of the world. For this reason Francis considered all our lights—candles, torches, lamps—as symbols, and he looked on their brilliancy with religious joy. He did not like to extinguish them. Finally, Jesus Christ received and accepted from S. John the Baptist the name of Lamb of God. He passed amongst men with the gentleness of a lamb. He sent His apostles into the world as lambs amongst wolves. On this account, besides the charm of their timidity and innocence, lambs were an object of

admiration and a sort of veneration to S. Francis. He would go out of his way to look at them, and was grieved if he saw them suffering.

One day, going through the Marches of Ancona, he met a man carrying two with their feet tied together, and hanging over his shoulder, one in front and one behind. Francis was moved to the heart at this representation of Jesus Christ bound and hanging on the cross. He uttered a cry, and went up quickly to the man and began stroking the poor little animals, almost as a mother might comfort a weeping child. "Why," said he to the man, "do you crucify my brothers the lambs, binding them and hanging them in that way?" "I am carrying them to the market; I want the money they are worth." "And when you have sold them, what will become of them?" "They will probably be killed and eaten." "That they shall not," said Francis. "Here, take my cloak and give me your lambs." The cloak had been given that day to the Saint, and was worth more than the lambs. The peasant accepted, and Francis became the possessor of the animals. He caressed them for a little while, and then began to think what he was to do with them. After consulting his companion, he decided to give them back to their first owner, on condition that he should not sell them, and should treat them with the greatest care. The reader can easily imagine what was the fate of these lambs! This is the weak side of mysticism of that kind, it cannot be carried out beyond a certain limit. Francis never thought of limits; he satisfied his heart at the time, and the morrow must take care of itself.

His compassion went so far as sometimes to contradict his theory of the love due to all creatures. It made him inexorably severe towards any aggressors, whoever they might be, of the friends and representatives of his Saviour. One day he had received hospitality at the convent of S. Verecondius near Gubbio. A lamb was born during the night, and unfortunately a sow that was there attacked the new-born creature and killed it. Francis was told of the event in the



morning. He was much grieved and wished to see the little victim. "Poor little brother lamb," he cried, "innocent animal, thou dost well represent to us the sacrifice of our Lord! Cursed be the wretch that killed thee! May neither man nor beast eat of its flesh." The effect of this imprecation was terrible. The sow fell ill and died at the end of three days. It was thrown into the valley, and no living thing would touch it; it dried up like a piece of wood.

He showed the same stern justice on another occasion; but this time the sin was much less, no creature had been killed, the culprit had only violated a moral law that it could not have known much about, but that did not signify, it had represented sin and not Jesus Christ, and Francis left it to its fate. This is the story. A pair of red-breasts were bringing up their young near the convent, and they used to come to pick up crumbs with which to feed their brood. Francis soon noticed them coming and going, and was delighted at their paternal solicitude. He had plenty of crumbs strewed for them, and all went on well; the young birds grew fast and were beginning to fly, when the parents brought them to the monastery. It seemed that they only wanted to present and offer their family to the brethren, for as soon as they had presented them they took flight and were seen no more. Francis was charmed with this little performance. "See," he said to his companions, "what our brothers the red-breasts have done. One would think they had reason. They came to say, here are our children, you have fed them with your crumbs, they are yours; do what you like with them, we are going to make our home elsewhere." It was unanimously decided that they would respond to this touching confidence. The young birds were welcomed, and they soon became familiar. They grew to know the brethren, and would feed from their hands. It was even remarked that they did not like seculars! They were perfect convent guests. But, alas! a frightful vice—the one that Francis especially detested—interrupted what had begun so well. The little birds used to eat together, and it was soon

observed that the strongest of the brood, after having eaten all it could, drove the others away from the food. "Oh, the wicked miser!" cried Francis, "he has filled himself, and he will not let his brothers have their turn. He will not die an easy death." The prediction was realised. After his meal, the culprit perched himself on the brim of a vase to drink. He lost his balance, fell into the water, and, in spite of all his efforts, was drowned.

Lastly, there is another aspect which made the creatures dear to S. Francis, but a few words of introduction are necessary to make it thoroughly understood.

Preaching once before Louis XIV., Bossuet said, "All nature desires to honour God and to adore the principle of its origin as much as it can. Being deprived of reason, all it can do is to present itself to us that we may know its Divine Author through it. Thus imperfectly, in its own way, it glorifies the heavenly Father. But in order that it may consummate its adoration, man must be its mediator; it is for him to lend it voice, intelligence, and a heart burning with love to all visible nature, that in him and by him it may love the invisible beauty of its Creator."

It is the honour of man, at least of man enlightened by revelation, to have always regarded this mediation as a duty, and truly it is not the least touching or amiable of the aspects that his religion towards God has taken from time to time.

The people of Israel at all times were the great adorers of the *God who made heaven and earth*. Before the Incarnation, creation was the great gift. The Hebrews praised God for this marvel, as we now adore Him for His still more marvellous work, namely, Jesus Christ. We can hardly read a page of the Old Testament without meeting with some sign of this religious disposition. It is this which adds especially to the charm of the poetry of the Psalms, prophecies, and some parts of the historical books. Amongst many canticles, we will select two of the best known.

The first is taken from the writings of King David,

whose songs truly gave a voice to the soul of the people of Israel :—

“ Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all ye deeps,  
Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds which fulfil His word,  
Mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars,  
Beasts and all cattle, serpents and feathered fowls.

“ Kings of the earth, and all people, princes and all judges of the earth. Young men and maidens ; let the old with the younger praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted.”—Ps. 148.

The second was sung in a furnace by three young confessors of the Divine Unity. In the midst of the flames they invited all creation to glorify God, as they would have done had they been in the cool morning breeze :—

“ O ye stars of heaven bless the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all for ever.

O every shower and dew, bless ye the Lord, &c.

O ye fire and heat, bless ye the Lord, &c.

O ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord, &c.

O all ye things that spring up on the earth, bless ye the Lord, &c.

O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord, &c.

O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye the Lord, &c.

All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, &c.”

The Church has not rejected this legacy of the chosen people. Though possessed of a higher grade of adoration, she has looked favourably upon this secondary form. When her pontiffs and priests have offered the holy sacrifice in the morning, and again in the evening,<sup>1</sup> she puts upon their lips the songs of David and of the Three Children, for she knows “that heaven and earth are full of the supreme Majesty,” and that man cannot have too many ways by which to ascend to God.

S. Francis was of the same opinion. He gave his cordial affection to nature. He penetrated her secrets, and would have well understood what Bossuet calls her desire and

<sup>1</sup> In the morning, immediately after the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the evening at Lauds. The rubrics prescribe that the priest shall recite the canticle of the Three Children on leaving the altar.

yearning. He did understand it so clearly that he very soon became her interpreter. He fulfilled her desire to reach towards her Creator by bearing her with himself into His Presence.

Celano says that he was of the race of Ananias, Azarias, and Misael; he invited all creatures to glorify Him who made them. He went through the scale of creation. Harvests, vineyards, rocks, forests, flowers of the field, fountains, the earth, fire, air, wind, he passed from one to the other preaching the Divine Love; he gave them his own fervour that they too might be moved to love. The Church teaches that an invisible link, which she calls the communion of Saints, exists amongst all the children of God, whether in heaven, in purgatory, or on earth. Francis would almost have made the inferior beings of the creation share in this communion, as the last of the children of the Heavenly Father.

At the end of his life, notwithstanding his want of skill, he wished to give a written, and, as far as possible, a definite form to this side of his mind and thoughts. For this purpose he composed what the moderns sometimes call the "Canticle of the Sun," and he himself called the "Song of the Creatures." It is at the same time a hymn of creation, a song of thanksgiving to the Creator, and a canticle of adoration offered for and with all creatures. Modern religious poetry has never produced anything comparable to it, in this particular order of ideas. "In it we feel," says M. Ozanam, "the breath of that Umbrian terrestrial paradise, where the sky is so brilliant and the earth so laden with flowers."<sup>1</sup>

- i. Most high, omnipotent, and good Lord,  
Thine are praise, glory, honour, and every benediction.

<sup>1</sup> "Poètes Franciscains," p. 74, A contemporary also has said gracefully: "The *Alleluia* of Assisi, in which the daylight, the starry mildness of the southern nights, the warm breath of the wind and the maternal graces of the earth, *nostra madre terra*, with her fruits and flowers, are invoked, bursts out like a festal song over the cradle of Italian poetry." Gebhart, the Apostolate of S. Francis of Assisi.



To Thee alone they are due, and no man is worthy to name Thee.

2. Praised be God, my Lord, with all Thy creatures, especially our noble brother the sun, who makes the day, and illuminates us with his light. He is beautiful and radiant with great splendour. He bears Thy sign, O Lord.
3. Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars. Thou hast made them clear and beautiful in heaven.
4. Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind and for the air, for cloudy, and for serene, and for all weather, by which Thou givest sustenance to Thy creatures.
5. Praised be my Lord for our sister the water, who is so useful, humble, chaste, and precious.
6. Praised be my Lord for our brother the fire, by whom thou dost illuminate the night, and he is beautiful, joyous, very vigorous, and strong.
7. Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, who nourishes and governs us, and produces diverse fruits and coloured flowers and herbs.
8. Praised be my Lord, for those who pardon for Thy love, and bear tribulations and infirmities.  
Blessed are those who endure in peace, for they shall be crowned by Thee the Most High.
9. Praised be my Lord for our sister the death of the body, from which no man living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin ; blessed are those who are found according to Thy Holy Will, for the second death cannot hurt them.
10. Praise, bless, and thank my Lord, and serve Him with great humility.<sup>1</sup>

The reader will see that the subject is interrupted in the last strophes. The reason of this is that, according to tradition, these two strophes did not exist in the first edition. They were both composed later, on memorable occasions. The first, *Praised be my Lord for those who pardon*, was inspired by a quarrel that had arisen between the Bishop and the magistrates of Assisi. The Bishop had fulminated an interdict ; the magistrates wished to outlaw

<sup>1</sup> Ozanam, in his "Poètes Franciscains," says, of the construction of this canticle : "Its language has all the simplicity of a nascent idiom, the rhythm, all the inexperience of unstudied poetry that easily satisfies unlearned hearers. The rhyme is sometimes replaced by assonance, sometimes it only appears in the middle or at the end of a verse. Critics will hardly find in it the regular conditions of a lyrical composition."

the prelate. "Go," said Francis to his companions, "and sing my Song of the Creatures to them, with its new verse." The method succeeded. The adversaries made mutual concessions, and shook hands. The second strophe had a still higher origin: no less than the personal salvation of Francis from death, when, by unmistakeable signs, he recognised its approach. Like the Psalmist, he rejoiced that he could say once more, "We will go into the house of the Lord." Hence the name of sister, given to what has been let loose upon us as an implacable enemy. No one could have proclaimed in better words that, since our Lord's resurrection, death has indeed lost its sting.

We have spoken of what Francis gave to nature. Nature was not ungrateful; she gave much to him in return. She richly repaid one who was so tenderly inclined towards her. She smiled at his caresses, forestalled his desires, obeyed his will, Celano says. It does seem as if the elements vied with each other in showing gratitude to S. Francis. We have already seen a brilliant light suddenly appear to guide him on his road. Presently we shall see fire moderate its heat to spare him pain in a surgical operation. Celano and S. Bonaventura tell us of water that was changed into wine for his benefit. He had fallen ill in the hermitage of S. Urbano. His strength was failing, and he thought that a little wine would restore him. He asked for some, but there was none in the monastery. In place of wine he had water brought to him, and he blessed this humble sister. Immediately it was changed into wine; and this wine had such a salutary effect, that Francis was restored to health. There was here an intervention of the Almighty. Both historians acknowledge this; but, at the same time, they insinuate that the water was not altogether foreign to this intervention: that it secretly called for it by its desire to do good to the Saint. It is rather a glorification of tendency; but we must accept it, since the elements are weak, as S. Paul said, and have no means for expressing what is in them.

However, it was not so much their kingdom as that of the animals which paid this debt of gratitude to the Saint. The animals in especial had this honour. Being nearer to man in the scale of creation than the other creatures, they become the natural representatives of the inferior grades. To express their attitude in regard to us, we are in the habit of dividing them into two classes: wild and tame animals. With Francis this distinction had no meaning. All were tame with him in an almost equal degree. Perhaps the domestic animals were the most familiar with him, and showed him the intelligence and attention of true friends.

Sheep, as being especially loved by him, were the first in this respect. He one day saw a flock of them grazing in the neighbourhood of Siena. As usual, he stopped to salute his sisters the sheep. Immediately all the sheep and lambs, and even the rams, stopped grazing, and ran up and flocked round the Saint, bleating and leaping, and showing every demonstration of tenderness. The shepherds were astonished at this triumphal reception, though they knew well the habits of their animals.

We know the affectionate link that there was between S. Francis and a Roman lady named Jacqueline, of Settisoli. Once, when he was in Rome, he wished to make her a little present in his own way. This was a young lamb that he had brought up carefully. As a good disciple of the school in which it had been educated, the lamb became the religious companion of the lady. It went to church with her, and remained there as long as she stayed, and then returned with her to her palace. If she was later than usual in rising in the morning, it awoke her by bleating, and made her hurry her toilette by butting her with its little horns, as if to inform her that the hour for worship had come. Jacqueline obeyed this little master of her devotions as quickly as she could. She regarded the lamb as a good disciple of S. Francis, and loved it on account of the service it rendered her.

Francis himself, at the Portiuncula, had a companion in devotion. This was a sheep that a pious person had given him. It soon performed wonders. This is how the "Chronicle of the Minors" translates S. Bonaventura : " He admonished it to be careful to praise God, and to take good heed not to offend or be offended by the religious ; all which things the sheep observed and did to the best of its power, and even as exactly as though it had sense to obey its master. When the religious went into the choir to sing, the little beast went too, and followed them to the church ; where, without any one having taught it, it bleated before the altar of the Virgin Mary and of her Son, the Lamb without spot, as though it would salute and honour them. And when the Holy Host was elevated at mass, it knelt, bending its knees, honouring and adoring its Creator." This sheep could have taught a lesson to many Christians ; we can understand what S. Francis thought of it !

It is not known that the wild animals ever did anything of that kind, but they laid down their ferocity and timidity in the presence of Francis. We have spoken of the leveret which was given to the Saint, and would not leave him without great difficulty. The same thing happened with a wild rabbit. It was on an island in Lake Thrasymene, where Francis had retreated for Lent. The rabbit attached itself to him and would not leave him till he had given it his benediction. There was much more ceremony observed with a pheasant that a nobleman of the province of Siena sent him. The donor wished him to eat it that his strength, which was daily declining, might be restored, but to eat it was far from the ideas of Francis. He received the beautiful bird with great courtesy. " Brother pheasant," he said, " praised be our Creator." The pheasant clapped its wings at this invitation. " Let us see," added Francis, " if our brother will stay with us, or if he would rather go back to his woods." By his orders the bird was carried to a vineyard, but it flew back directly. They carried it further off ; it was back again before its carrier had returned. It even



got into the cell of S. Francis, slipping under the tunics of the brethren who stood at the entrance. For that time Francis caressed the faithful creature, spoke to it kindly, and ordered them to give it food. But he did not intend to keep it. He gave it to his doctor, who, having heard of what had passed, was full of admiration and asked to have it. The pheasant, however, did not approve of this. It refused to eat, and they had to bring it back to the convent. There it gazed for a long time on the Father, gave great signs of joy, and began to eat with an appetite. In all these anecdotes there is such exquisite simple tenderness that in reading them one is inclined to smile and to weep at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

Here is another story showing how the wild things grew tame in the society of the Saint. A grasshopper took up its abode on a fig-tree, near his cell, at the Portiuncula. It chirped as all grasshoppers do chirp. One day the Saint held out his hand to it and said, "Sister grasshopper, come to me." It obeyed and jumped on to his hand. "Sing, sister grasshopper," said Francis, "praise the Lord with thy jubilant cry." It began and continued its jubilant cry till Francis told it it was a good grasshopper, then it went back to its fig-tree. For a whole week the Saint, who had found out its hiding-place, visited it every day. He stroked it gently with his finger and said, "Sing," and it sang. At last he said to his companions: "Let us send away our sister the grasshopper, it has rejoiced us long enough with its songs, we might end by becoming vain of it." The grasshopper departed, "as a good obedient daughter," and was not seen again.

A nightingale did still better, but then it is higher in the scale of creation. Francis was staying on La Vernia. He had passed through the sufferings and the ecstasy of the Stigmata. He was spiritually in a supernatural, seraphic state. But his mind was marvellously open to all things, and he was highly sensible to the beauty of the world. One evening the songster of the woods began one of its finest

<sup>1</sup> Frédéric Morin. "Saint François et les Franciscains," p. 102.

melodies on a tree hard by. Francis listened, and was filled with emotion. Brother Leo was beside him. "Answer it," said Francis to him. Brother Leo excused himself on account of his bad voice. Francis took the part and answered the nightingale. The Saint and the bird sang alternately. Part of the night was spent in this contest. Francis was tired first. He made the bird come on his hand, caressed it gently, congratulated it on having gained the victory, and said to Brother Leo: "Let us give our brother the nightingale something to eat, he deserves it more than I do." The bird ate some crumbs from the hand of the Seraphic Father, and flew away with his benediction.

The savage animals were little behind their tame brethren in their affection to the Saint. The first we hear of is a bird of prey, a falcon. We know that these birds are easily domesticated, but this one was quite wild. Like the nightingale, it inhabited the woods of La Vernia. Its eyry was not far from the cell Francis occupied on the mountain. No words were exchanged between the neighbours. By some unknown attraction, or rather, as the historians say, by divine instruction, the bird learnt the habits of the Saint, and took upon itself the office of a servant. The fact is that it acted as a living clock for Francis. Every night at the hour that he was accustomed to rise for prayer, it called him, and, what shows a yet higher instinct, if the Saint was more than usually overcome with suffering, the bird respected his sleep and woke him later, at the first glimmering of dawn, and it was observed at those times it modulated its harsh voice and made it almost harmonious. If a falcon went as far as that, remarks a biographer, no wonder that gentler animals showed even greater veneration to him.

Now we come to "Brother Wolf," who is so universally beloved, that if he were left out, the history of S. Francis would seem incomplete. Yet "brother wolf" is not very authentic. The historians of Francis did not know him, or if they did they despised him, which is not at all probable. We are indebted for him to tradition. It may be an ear of

corn that escaped the true harvesters, and has been saved by her and embellished according to her fashion ; or it may be only an allegory to show us the beneficent influence of the Saint over the rude society of his time. In any case we can only receive it as tradition has given it to us. This is the account from the *Fioretti*.<sup>1</sup>

“ At the time when S. Francis was staying in the city of Gubbio, there appeared in the country around a huge wolf, terrible and ferocious, which not only devoured animals but men also, and all the citizens were in great fear. It often came quite near to the city, so that all who went out had to go armed as if they were going to battle, and even thus, one man alone could not defend himself from it. The terror became so great at last that no one dared leave the town. Wherefore S. Francis, having compassion on the people, wished to go out to meet this wolf, though all the citizens advised him not to do so, and making the sign of the most holy cross, and placing all his confidence in God, he went out with his companions. And when the others were afraid to go any further S. Francis went on alone to the place where the wolf was. And behold the wolf, perceiving many people who had come out to see this miracle, rushed towards S. Francis with its mouth open ; and S. Francis going towards it made the sign of the most holy cross over it, and called it to him, saying : ‘ Come hither, brother wolf ; I command thee by Jesus Christ to do no harm either to me or to any one.’ Wonderful to relate ! as soon as S. Francis had made the sign of the cross, the terrible wolf closed its mouth, and left off running : and hearing the command, it came gently like a lamb and lay down at the feet of S. Francis. Then he spoke thus to it : ‘ Brother wolf, thou hast done much evil in these parts, and hast committed great crimes, destroying and killing God’s

<sup>1</sup> Some modern authors have thought well to make out that the wolf was a wicked nobleman named Lupus. This Lord Lupus is really less credible than the wolf itself. The latter has at least a legend which goes back very far ; the former is only an imagination sprung up after several centuries.

creatures without leave : and thou hast not only killed and devoured beasts, but hast had the audacity to kill men made in the image of God, for which thing thou deservest the gibbet as the worst thief and murderer. Every one cries out and complains of thee, and this whole place is at enmity with thee. But, brother wolf, I wish to make peace between thee and them, so that thou mayest offend them no more, and they may pardon thee all thy past offences, and neither men nor dogs shall pursue thee again.' At these words, the wolf, with movements of its body, tail and eyes, and by bending its head, showed that it accepted, and would observe what S. Francis said. Then S. Francis repeated : ' Brother wolf, since thou art willing to make and keep this peace, I promise that I will make the men of this land continually give thee supplies as long as thou livest, that thou mayest not suffer from hunger, for I know well that it was hunger that caused thee to do all that evil. But since I obtain this grace for thee, brother wolf, thou must promise me never to hurt any human being or animal ; wilt thou promise this ? ' And the wolf, bending its head, gave evident signs that it promised. And S. Francis said : ' Brother wolf, thou must give me a pledge of this promise, that I may trust thee surely ' ; and S. Francis, stretching out his hand to receive the pledge, the wolf raised its right fore-paw, and gently placed it in S. Francis' hand, giving him such pledges as he could. Then S. Francis said : ' Brother wolf, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ, that thou come with me now, without fear, and we will go and confirm this peace in the name of God.' And the wolf obediently went away with him like a gentle lamb, at which sight the citizens greatly marvelled. And quickly this news spread through the city, and everybody, men and women, old and young, great and small, ran to the piazza to see the wolf with S. Francis. And when all the people were assembled, S. Francis stood up to preach to them, saying amongst other things, how God had permitted such things for their sins, and that the fire of hell which the damned suffer eternally



is far worse than the rage of a wolf that can only kill the body ; and how much more then should the mouth of hell be feared, when a whole population can be kept in fear and trembling by the mouth of a small animal ? Return then, O beloved ones, to God, and do worthy penance for your sins, and God will deliver you from the wolf now, and from the fire of hell in the future. And when the sermon was ended S. Francis said ; ‘ Listen, my brethren, brother wolf, who is here before you, has promised, and given me a pledge, that he will make peace with you, and never again offend you in anything ; and you must promise to give him all that is necessary for him every day, and I will be surety for him that he will keep the compact firmly.’ Then the people, with one voice, promised to feed him always. And S. Francis, before them all, said to the wolf : ‘ And thou, brother wolf, dost thou promise to observe this compact of peace, and never to offend men or animals or any other creature ?’ And the wolf knelt and bent its head, and with gentle movements of its body, tail, and ears, showed as well as it could, that it would keep the compact. All these things caused such joy and admiration amongst the people, both through devotion to the Saint and the novelty of the miracle, as well as for the peace with the wolf, that they all began to cry to heaven, praising and blessing God that He had sent S. Francis to them, who by his merits had delivered them from the mouth of the cruel beast. The wolf lived two years longer at Gubbio, and went familiarly in and out of the houses without doing any harm to anyone, or receiving any itself, and was courteously fed by the people, and not even a dog would bark at it as it went about the place and in and out of the houses. At last, after two years, brother wolf died of old age, and the citizens were very sorry, because seeing him going about so gently they were the better reminded of the virtue and holiness of S. Francis.”

All these anecdotes, except the last, and two or three others that we have taken from the legend, have been drawn from the true sources of history. The historians attribute

the secret of this extraordinary power in S. Francis to his great holiness. They say that he had recovered original innocence, and thus regained the sovereignty which is the right of the head of creation. There must be some truth in this explanation, for we find that all hagiographers adopt it when accounting for similar facts. But, on the other hand, there are many objections to it. For example, if this sovereignty were an appanage of recovered innocence, how is it that so many eminent Saints have not possessed it? It seems nearer the truth to say that holiness does not necessarily confer this power. The friend of God must receive besides a peculiar gift of an indefinable nature. It may sometimes only be a kind of sympathy that knows how to show itself and make itself acceptable, for our humble brethren have a very simple policy; they love those who love them, and give themselves to those who help them. At other times it may be something more magisterial, an air of authority expressed by the person of the Saint compelling the most rebellious to submit. We will add that true Christians are only astonished that this gift, whatever it may be, is so seldom met with. "O God!" exclaims Bossuet, "I have considered Thy works and I have been afraid. Where is that empire that Thou gavest us over the animals? We see but a small remains of it amongst us, as it were a feeble memorial of our former power, and a miserable fragment of our departed fortune."<sup>1</sup> S. Francis' life is a consolation to all those who mourn over this. In him the ancient sceptre was regained, and the empire was almost entirely re-established. The animals came to do him homage as they did to our first father in the earthly paradise.

<sup>1</sup> "Élévations sur les Mystères v<sup>n</sup>. semaine I<sup>re</sup>. élévation.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### HIS PRIVATE LIFE.

WE use these words "private life" in a more restricted sense than is generally understood by them. By this title we wish to make known the conversation that S. Francis had with himself about himself; it was in great part the secret of his strength. We shall touch upon the various points that he met with in his interior transactions with himself.

First: Humility. We begin with it: it occupies the first place in the interior life. What a wide difference there is between the proud man who exalts himself and takes the merit of all the good that is in him to himself, and the humble man who is always thankful and dependent. The latter is right, his state of mind induces the divine grace to give him yet more of the gifts it has already bestowed on him. The former is wrong; God ceases to give those gifts which by their very excellence would end by overpowering the receiver. We shall see how Francis understood and practised this essential virtue.

If humility means ignoring or depreciating what grace works within us, then Francis was not humble. He liked to proclaim that he owed much to the divine liberality; but, far from being made proud by this, it was one of the strongest bases of his humility. There is a short account from the *Fioretti* characteristic of this quality. "One day Fra Masseo, wishing to prove the Saint's humility, went to meet him as he was returning from the wood where he had been praying, and, as if jeering at him, said, 'Why to thee? why to thee? why to thee?' S. Francis answered, 'What dost thou mean?' Fra Masseo said, 'I mean, why does all the world come straight to thee, and every one seems to

wish to see and hear and obey thee? Thou art not a fine man to look at, nor art thou great in science, or noble; then why does all the world come after thee?' Hearing this, S. Francis rejoiced in spirit. He raised his eyes to heaven, and remained for a while with his mind fixed on God, and then he knelt down and gave thanks and praise to God; then, with great fervour of spirit, he turned to Fra Masseo and said: 'Wilt thou know why to me? wilt thou know why to me? wilt thou know why to me all the world comes? This I have from the eyes of the most high God, who in every place beholds the good and the wicked; because those most holy eyes have seen none more vile, more insufficient, nor worse than me amongst sinners; and therefore He has elected me to confound the nobility, the grandeur, the strength, the beauty, and the wisdom of the world, that men may know that all virtue and all good are from Him, and not from the creature, and no one can glory in His presence; but if any will glory, let him glory in the Lord, to whom belongs all honour and glory for ever.' Fra Masseo, at this humble answer so fervently given, feared, and knew certainly that S. Francis was full of humility."

It was indeed true Christian humility. In great hearts, it springs up less from the sentiment of their own misery than from a clear view of the divine gifts. They are astonished to find themselves the objects of such great condescension. The nearer God approaches to them, the more they tremble in their own nothingness. Their whole being exclaims, "Lord, I am not worthy of it." Thus David sang: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" and S. Peter, after the miraculous draught of fishes, cried: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." A daughter of S. Francis, the blessed Angela of Foligno, has well defined this emotion. "True humility," she said, "is that which crushes the soul under the sentiment of the divine goodness." Francis was entirely of this opinion. He went straight to the Author of every gift, and referred honour to Him to whom it is due. Consequently he had a privilege



that is only granted to the humble : he could speak of what was done for him without being tempted to self-satisfaction. We have seen how he avoided it. He declared even that a man is not truly spiritual if the hidden part of his life is not richer and more perfect than the part that appears externally. But he liked to be hidden, as much from modesty and a delicate mystery of tenderness, as from humility. Whenever there was need for it, that is, if it added to God's glory, or if his friends could gain any benefit thereby, he did not hesitate to reveal the high favours he had received. He once made this astonishing communication to one of his friends, one, doubtless, who was worthy to hear it : "There is at this day, upon earth, a certain servant of God who is very dear to his Master. As long as he lives God will not permit famine to reign amongst men. After him it will be otherwise." Though he manifestly alluded to himself as a man who had become the salvation of the people, there was no vanity in it, says Celano. Perhaps he had just learned this extraordinary testimony of God's tenderness to him,—he was moved by it, and wanted a friend's heart into which he could pour out his own, and who would praise God with and for him. Such is the marvellous liberty of souls established in the truth.<sup>1</sup> Francis carried this liberty very far. Certainly no one could say that he liked display. Throughout his life he fled from honours, and kept in the background and the lowest conditions, as is shown by the name which he chose for his order. But, as we have seen, the more he abased himself, the more glory sought him out. He became the object of a veritable cultus. As soon as he appeared in public there was a struggle to kiss his hands or his garments, and to show him honour. Generally these exhibitions were rather trying to him. "A good reproach would

<sup>1</sup> We have already spoken of this liberty of soul. The disciples of S. Francis regarded it as one of the qualities of their vocation. "I had already been to Rome," writes the Blessed Angela of Foligno, "to beg of the blessed Saints, Peter and Paul, the grace and liberty necessary to be really poor."—"The Book of Visions," ch. xx.

be better," he said; "it would oblige us to reflect and to amend ourselves. Homage, if it does not corrupt us, yet leaves us where it found us." Sometimes, however, he gave himself up to it, if not with joy, at least with a readiness that astonished even those who thought they knew him well. "My brother," said his companion to him one day, "do you not see what they are doing for you? How can you permit such things? They honour you as they would hardly honour a saint. You do not reject any of these marks of veneration; you even seem to find a sort of pleasure in them. How is that?" The blessed Father answered: "Far from repulsing these honours, they scarcely seem to me sufficient. I think these good people might do more." The companion was more and more perplexed. "I do not understand," he said, "how you, my brother, who have the reputation of a saint, can seek the praise of men." "Listen, and understand," said Francis. "I neither attribute nor appropriate to myself anything that they do for me; I refer all to God, fixing my eyes on His majesty, and keeping myself in the dust from which I was formed. Thus I am like a statue that men respect; it feels and retains nothing, all goes to him whom it represents. So much for myself. As to these good people, dost thou not perceive the advantage they gain from their religious zeal? A man cannot ignore God in himself, when he honours the divine benefits in one of his fellow-creatures." How great was this humility that gained strength from what would have made shipwreck of others! S. Thomas teaches that in such cases there is magnanimity; truly there was great magnanimity in the humility of S. Francis.

He was, besides, so convinced of this truth, that he made a maxim of what he himself practised. Remembering the word of the apostle: "Let him who would glory, glory in the Lord," he one day thus beautifully commented upon it to his disciples. "We must never glory in doing what a sinner can do. A sinner can fast, pray, weep, macerate his flesh, but one thing he cannot do: he cannot be entirely faithful to his

Lord. And for us, that is our true subject for glorification, and we may glory in it if we give God the praise due to Him, and if, serving Him faithfully, we ascribe to Him all the gifts He bestows on us."

This attitude of sincere gratitude is the real basis of humility. If it were not superfluous after S. Francis' own words, we might say how, according to the doctors and theologians, the angelic spirits, those perfect creatures, have no other humility than gratitude. But we must not exaggerate. For those blessed spirits, who are confirmed in grace, and possess all things in possessing God, it may be so, but for ourselves, formed from the dust of the earth, who bear our treasure in a fragile vessel, and who never, whatever we may do, are able to exert the whole of our strength, for us gratitude can only be one of the foundations of our humility. If we wish our humility to be securely based we must go on our way mistrusting our own strength, and mourning for our innumerable failings. Francis was too much enlightened by God not to perceive this other aspect of humility.

He was always extremely troubled at the leaven of corruption that we bear within us, and that grace itself only partially removes. When he felt it working and stirring in his heart, he was greatly disturbed. The presence of evil within him in spite of himself was a sad revelation of misery ; his whole soul seemed to be shaken by it. On these occasions he became rough and almost impatient. "Do not praise me in this way," he said to those who spoke of him as if he were already perfect in virtue. "Neither my innocence nor my salvation are sure ; I may commit sins, become disordered, and unworthy of God and of men." Needless to say that he was far from falling into the abysses he saw yawning around him. The Church is convinced that his life was the holiest of the holy. But his emotion was salutary, it sufficed to warn him, and to make him redouble his circumspection and austerities. His grief was much greater if he thought he had yielded, even for a moment. However venial the fault may have been, he looked upon it as a sin. He had no rest

till he had made a public confession of it. He once had an unfavourable thought about one of his brethren. Immediately he went to him and confessed it, asking his pardon. Another time he had given his cloak to a woman with what seemed to him unnecessary pleasure. He confessed it to all who were present. His soul hungered for truth in all things. It may be said that he raised sincerity to heroism. He was worthy of formulating the beautiful saying which some years later delighted the author of the *Imitation*: "What a man is in the sight of God, that he is, and nothing more."<sup>1</sup>

Like S. Paul, he did not think himself justified even if his conscience did not accuse him. He knew that God requires our co-operation that His grace which He bestows on us may bear fruit in our lives. This He has shown us in the striking parable of the talents. Francis had meditated on that parable, and when he thought of all he had received he was afraid. It seemed to him that he had done nothing in return. "Francis," he used to say, "if God had given a robber as much as He has given thee, the robber would be holier than thou." He once had an opportunity of manifesting this conviction in an almost solemn manner. He had passed the night praying in a deserted church with one of his brethren, Brother Pacificus, if the tradition is to be believed. The latter had a vision in which he saw several empty thrones in heaven, and one of these thrones seemed higher and more splendid than the others. He was looking at it and wondering for whom it was intended, when a voice said to him: "It was the throne of one of the fallen angels; it is now reserved for the humble Francis." Pacificus was filled with admiration; if it had been possible his respect for his master would have increased. The next day he was still wondering over what had been shown to him, and he wished to find out whether Francis had any suspicion of the glory that awaited him. As they walked along together, he suddenly asked him, "What do you think of yourself, my Father?" "I," answered Francis, "I am the last of sinners."

<sup>1</sup> "De Imitatione Christi," lib. iii. cap. 50.



Pacificus replied that he could not conscientiously either think or say such a thing. "I do think it," said Francis, "I am convinced that if a rogue had received as much grace as I have, he would be ten times more spiritual than I am." At the same time the Spirit of God, as if to justify the vision, said secretly to the brother: "Thou hast not been deceived. Humility will seat this most humble man on the throne from whence pride has been expelled."

But this is what this man, who thought he did so little, really did for his Lord. He was one of his best workers. He never lost a particle of the divine gifts. He never allowed a minute of his life to be empty. His maxim was that not to advance was to go back, and that to do no good was an outrage on divine grace. The desire for perfection haunted him till it amounted almost to suffering. One night at Siena he called the brothers who were in the convent and said to them: "My brethren, I have just been entreating the Lord to make me know when I am and when I am not His servant. You know it is my ambition to be His servant always. Now, this is what the Lord in His goodness has vouchsafed to answer me: 'Consider thyself My servant whenever thou thinkest, speakest, or actest in a holy manner.' I tell you this answer at once that I may be covered with confusion if you ever find me omitting to do any of these three things." "He was always young for goodness," says Celano: "though he was full of merits; whenever it was a question of virtue he had all the fresh ardour of a beginner."

We might here end all we have to say about the humility of S. Francis, if he had not invented an artificial means of fortifying that virtue, as he had invented one for renewing his joy. Though his conscience never slumbered, he would not trust to its promptings alone. He had himself constantly reminded from without of the miserable condition he was in when grace sought him out, and he had recourse to this antidote whenever he thought the poison of praise and glory had been too lavishly poured out upon him. He would

call one of his disciples and say: "Tell me some good truths to counteract all these lies." And at his dictation, the brother, in spite of his unwillingness, must say: "You are a man without education, a merchant, a man who has risen from nothing." "Very well," replied Francis, smiling, "God bless thee. That is what the son of Peter Bernardone ought to hear, it is the real truth."

Unfortunately, this method sometimes failed, not from want of sincerity on the part of Francis, for he received these mortifying words as readily as others receive flattery, but because sometimes through invincible respect, sometimes by an inspiration from on high, the accuser was transformed into a panegyrist. The *Fioretti* gives us a curious example of this reversion of the parts. As usual, the clever narrator embellishes things a little, but the historical foundation is apparent nevertheless.

"S. Francis once went with Brother Leo to a convent where there was no book of the divine office. When the time for matins was come S. Francis said to Brother Leo, 'My beloved brother, we have no breviary with which to say matins; but in order that we may spend the time in praising God, I will speak and thou must answer as I tell thee, and beware not to alter the words that I give thee. I shall say: O Brother Francis, thou hast done so much evil and sin in the world that thou art worthy of hell: and thou Brother Leo wilt answer: It is true that thou deservest the lowest abyss of hell.' And Brother Leo, with dove-like simplicity, answered: 'Willingly, Father; begin in God's name.' Then S. Francis began to say: 'O Brother Francis, thou hast done so much evil and sin in the world, that thou art worthy of hell.' And Brother Leo replied: 'God will do so much good by thee that thou wilt go to Paradise.' S. Francis said, 'Say not so, Brother Leo, but when I say, Brother Francis, thou hast committed so many iniquities against God, that thou deservest to be cursed by Him, thou must answer: Truly thou art worthy to be placed amongst the cursed.' And Brother Leo replied, 'Willingly, Father.'

Then S. Francis, with many tears and sighs and beating his breast, said aloud : ‘O my Lord, Lord of heaven and earth, I have committed against thee such iniquities and sins that I deserve to be cursed by Thee.’ And Brother Leo replied : ‘O Brother Francis, God will make thee such, that amongst the blessed thou shalt be singularly blessed.’ And S. Francis, marvelling that Brother Leo answered the contrary to what he enjoined on him, reproved him, saying : ‘Why dost thou not answer as I tell thee? I command thee, by holy obedience, to answer as I tell thee. I shall say : Oh wicked Brother Francis, dost thou think that God will have mercy on thee, when thou hast committed so many sins against the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation that thou art not worthy to find mercy? And thou Brother Leo, little lamb, wilt answer : In no way art thou worthy to find mercy.’ But when S. Francis said : ‘Oh wicked Brother Francis,’ etc., Brother Leo answered : ‘God the Father, whose mercy is more infinite than thy sins, will have great mercy on thee, and will moreover grant thee much grace.’ And at this answer Francis, gently angered, and troubled without impatience, said to Brother Leo : ‘And why hast thou had the presumption thus to speak against obedience, and hast answered so many times the opposite to what I told thee?’ Brother Leo replied with much humility and reverence : ‘God knows, my father, that every time I had it in my heart to answer as thou commandedst me, but God made me speak as He pleased and not as I pleased.’”

His sincere efforts had the result that was to be looked for. Francis became one of the humblest men who ever lived. *Humilis sanctus Franciscus*, as the author of the *Imitation* calls him. According to Celano, he was humble in all his sentiments, and still more humble in the judgment he passed on himself. He thought it even better to be without virtue than to make virtue a pedestal for vanity. Amongst men emulous of lowliness, he was the lowliest of all, though God had made him a prince in His house. His humility was reflected externally in his person.

He was affable, easy to live with, and of a genial disposition. His historian goes on to say that there was neither haughtiness in his speech, nor affectation in his gestures, nor display in his actions.

Second : Chastity. Christian moralists have always taught that there is a close connection between humility and chastity. According to them the humble soul is by necessary consequence chaste also. This doctrine is clear to any one who reflects. God grants special support to those who lean upon Him. He gives them His grace, and this grace, increasing with difficulties, suffices to assure them the victory. And for their own part they advance cautiously, wisely mistrusting their own strength, and always ready at the least danger to turn towards the source of all purity, and thus humility renders them less vulnerable.

These two causes were the secret of the chastity of S. Francis. God had given him that which is a preparation for an innocent life, a soul imbued with reserve and respect. This original gift, like all Divine gifts, was without repentance, and God watched over, or rather guarded him, for he needed a special guard when in the days of his youth he set his sails to the world and to pleasure, and later on he was spared the emotion and storms of passion. We have seen how at different times he rolled himself in the snow or amongst brambles, to gain the mastery over himself. We must not misconstrue this harsh treatment. It came less from the violence of temptation than from one of the highest maxims of the Saint. Francis asserted that it is more tolerable for a spiritual man to suffer torture in his flesh than to feel in his heart an evil delectation, even though it be slight and involuntary.

When words are followed by deeds, as was the case with this servant of God, we admire the strong self-government, without forgetting that it is not possible for all to imitate it. The holy author of the *Devout Life* comes nearer to common human capacities, and perhaps nearer to ordinary wisdom, when he advises that such fugitive impressions



should be treated as flies on our path, with disdain and inattention.<sup>1</sup>

Francis guarded this heavenly gift with the strictest precautions. Far from trusting in his own strength, he not only avoided all intimacy, but almost all relations with women. "Their society," he said, "is a sweet poison, a poison mixed with honey," and therefore he almost always denied himself this society. His historians say that it was more than reserve, it might almost be called terror, or horror, though in reality it was not so. He relaxed a little in favour of those in whom, thanks to solid piety, wisdom seemed to have taken up her abode, but even with them he imposed severe rules on himself. In speaking to them he raised his voice so as to be heard by those who were near, and he took care that the interview should be edifying and short. As soon as the conversation began to approach worldly matters, he raised his eyes and appeared to be seeking his answers in heaven. If the conversation threatened to be too prolonged, he took refuge in a frigid silence. Finally, he never looked in the face of a woman while talking to her. This he carried so far that he once told a companion that, with two exceptions, doubtless S. Clara and her sister Agnes, he could not recognise any woman again.

The following anecdote shows how faithful he was to this latter practice: One fast day, on his way to Bevagna, he was taken with such faintness that it was impossible for him to go any further. He sat down at the road side. At the same time, his companion went to a pious lady who lived near, and told her of what had happened. He begged her to have compassion on the Saint and to send him a little bread and wine. The lady at once brought him all that was

<sup>1</sup> As to those trivial temptations of vanity, suspicion, peevishness, envy, jealousy, flirtations, and such like trifles, which, like gnats and flies, pass before our eyes, and sting us sometimes on the cheek, sometimes on the nose, so that it is impossible to be quite free from their importunity, the best resistance one can make to them is not to be tormented by them.—"Devout Life," 4th part, chap. ix.

necessary. Her daughter, a young girl who had been piously educated, accompanied her. Francis took some of the food, and his strength returned. Feeling better he wished to make a return for the kindness by giving spiritual food to those who had brought him material nourishment. He addressed some edifying words to the mother and daughter, but without looking at either. When they were gone his companion said to him: "Why did you not look at that good girl who had come to help you so kindly?" "My son," replied Francis, "who would not fear to look on a spouse of Jesus Christ? I spoke to her. If our eyes and features add anything to what we say, she was at liberty to look at me, but not I at her." This rigid discipline bore fruit. Francis passed amongst men without receiving or communicating any bad impressions. That is true innocence of life, and in return he had all the charm and glory which belong to pure souls. "Oh! how beautiful, how glorious he was in his innocence, in his purity of heart, in his angelic expression of countenance," says Celano.

He endeavoured to clothe his children with the same white robe of purity that he wore himself. He was jealous of the honour of his Order, and he knew that the honour of an Order depends on the virtue of its members. His words became authoritative whenever he approached this subject with his brethren, and they felt that his life and heart were in what he said. By turns he treated of familiar relations, conversations, looks.

Familiarity he unhesitatingly declared to be fatal. "The weak are shipwrecked, and even the strong lose something by it," he said. "Unless a man's virtue be well proved, it is a contagion as difficult to escape from as it is to walk on burning coals without scorching the soles of one's feet." So absolute a principle admitted but of one conclusion, familiarity must be avoided even with the best people.

He would have liked to forbid conversation also. "What can a Minor have to do with a woman?" he said. "Perhaps to receive her at the tribunal of penance and to address her

the customary exhortation." Anything beyond that he considered lost time, for, he said, such conversations are frivolous and dangerous, and if care be not taken, they soon lead to familiarity. As much as possible to obviate this misfortune, he wished no brother to speak alone with a woman without the door being left open, so that he might be in sight of his companion.

He was no less exacting about modesty in looks. He wished that, like Job, all his children should make a compact with their eyes never to look at a woman. "How imprudent it is," he said, "to fill one's imagination with beautiful forms, which by-and-bye, unexpectedly presenting themselves, threaten to re-awaken the smouldering fire of concupiscence!" He had another reason. He saw that in speaking of virgins and widows, the Church often said: the virgin of Christ, the spouse of Christ; and taking these words literally they were another ground for reticence. An indiscreet look seemed to him like a usurpation of the rights of the Divine Spouse.

To inspire the same sentiment in his brethren, he composed a little apologue in his own style, which he often repeated to them: "A powerful king sent two messengers in succession to his wife. The first, when admitted into the queen's presence, saw nothing; he was all ears. On his return he simply reported what had been said to him. The second, on the contrary, delivered his message in a few words, and then began an endless eulogy on the beauty of the queen. 'Truly, sire,' he said, 'you have a most beautiful wife, you are very fortunate.' 'Wicked servant,' replied the king, 'thou hast cast curious looks upon the queen, therefore thou hast had evil thoughts.' Then he called back the first messenger. 'What dost thou think of the queen?' he asked. 'All that is good,' he replied prudently. 'Yes, but didst thou not think her beautiful?' 'Sire,' continued the messenger, 'that is your affair, mine was to bring you back her message.' The king was convinced. 'Thy looks are chaste,' he said, 'therefore thy

conduct must be so. I make thee Grand Chamberlain. As to the other, he is unworthy of my confidence ; let him depart hence within an hour.' ”

Even with all these precautions, Francis feared a deceitful state of security. “Do not slumber,” he said to the brethren, “that is a great snare of the enemy ; he employs it day and night. Though you have resisted him for years he cares not, so long as you are vanquished at last. Therefore watch ; concede nothing, for if you were to give him even a hair of your head, he would make a beam out of it.”

Third : Obedience. There is yet another virtue resulting from that interior conversation of which we spoke at the beginning of this chapter. On almost every occasion, by the action of our mind alone, we have our own views, we give to things our own arrangement, and assign to ourselves a place in it. The result of this little policy with its personal expedients is that if we aim at things above the state in which we are placed, we exalt ourselves within and become indocile. But if we treat all this interior work as the dream of a moment, that will vanish before the authoritative opinions of those who direct us, then we enter on the path of deference and the virtue of obedience.

By this means, Francis was far advanced in that virtue, for never perhaps was any man less obstinately attached to his own judgment and opinions. He said : “A Minor has not abandoned all for God, as long as he keeps in his hand the purse of his own opinion.” We are even inclined to question whether he made sufficient use of the wonderful light that was bestowed upon him. For example, he often preferred his companions' advice to his own, which may have been an act of modesty, but he sometimes went so far as to give up an idea even when it had come to him by a special revelation, and this is more difficult to understand. Whatever may have been his reasons, this practice proves how far he was from loving authority for its own sake. He exercised it because it was necessary, but he regarded it as a burden. To obey seemed to him easier and safer, and he was happy



when he was able to resign his office of minister-general. He immediately asked for a personal guardian, on whom he could depend in all his conduct and all his acts, and in obeying him he felt in his element. "I have received from heaven this gift," he said, "that I could obey a novice of an hour as easily as I could the wisest and oldest in our Order. The subordinate must not consider the man, but the Blessed God whose organ a superior is." From this point of view, it was of no consequence to him if the one from whom he received his orders was without gifts to recommend him. In such circumstances the obedience to God seemed more direct, the abnegation more complete and sweeter. Once, speaking on this subject, he said with a sort of enthusiasm: "I lately saw a blind man led by a very small dog." To be reduced to a guide taught only by instinct was to him the same as being entirely in God's hands. His piety tempted him to envy that fate and that situation. After this we can understand that he made obedience the soul of the religious life. It is obedience that creates, animates, and maintains those great bodies of men called the monastic families. Francis was not satisfied with an indifferent kind of obedience. It must have in it all the conditions which make its beauty. According to him, these conditions were three in number. 1st, *promptness*. On this point he was exacting. He said that a religious who, after receiving a command, does not hasten to obey it, has lost all fear of God and all respect for men. 2nd, *cordiality*. Superiors bear for us a heavy burden of vigils, solicitude, and work. It is our duty to love them. We neglect this duty, and at the same time destroy all discipline, if, instead of entering into their views, we murmur and foment a spirit other than their own. 3rd, *absoluteness*. By that he meant that obedience does not consist only in doing what we are ordered to do at the time, but in keeping ourselves in the disposition to do what we are commanded on all occasions. The strong image by which he illustrated the extent of this duty has become celebrated. One day, when he was sitting amongst his

brethren, he said, sighing : " I do not know whether, in the whole world, there is a religious who perfectly obeys his superior." His companions, much moved, answered : " Tell us then, Father, in what this perfect obedience consists." " Take a corpse," said Francis, " and place it where you will, it will execute the movements you impose on it ; it will not murmur at any attitude you may make it take ; it will not complain if you leave it alone ; if you set it on a throne it will look down, not up ; if you lay it on purple it will seem twice as pale. That is the image of a truly obedient religious. He is sent to another place, he does not seek to know why ; he is sent hither and thither, and he goes willingly ; he is left where he is, and he does not ask to go elsewhere ; he is put into some office, and he remains as humble as before ; important concerns are entrusted to him, and he thinks himself more unworthy than ever."

In connection with obedience, Francis once treated of permissions. Whether works done by virtue of a permission deserve the name of acts of obedience. He allowed that such works were good, but said that, in his opinion, it was better to call them *licences*, and to reserve the name of acts of obedience for works accomplished by virtue of a spontaneous injunction from a superior. He made an exception for a case in which flesh and blood have evidently no part ; namely, when, by divine inspiration, a brother asked leave to go amongst the infidels, to work for their conversion, and, if need be, to shed his blood for the faith. That, he said, is the work of all others, the supreme obedience to God and to the Order.

It is to be remarked that this man, who insisted so much on obedience, yet considered that superiors should seldom command. No one loved authority less than he. " A command," he said, " is like a sword : a brave man only draws it at the last extremity." There is in reality no contradiction in this, though at first sight it may seem so. If obedience is perfect, that is, if the laws of conscience and

of the rule are understood by all, there is less place for the intervention of superiors. The work, one of peace and harmony worthy of God and of men, in a measure accomplishes itself by the union of minds and wills. This is the aim of all communities deserving of the title. Bossuet, speaking of a celebrated congregation, said: "There holy liberty makes holy engagements; there is obedience without dependence, government without commands; authority is hidden in gentleness, and respect is maintained without the help of fear."<sup>1</sup> This was the ideal that Francis sought to realise by diminishing authority and fortifying obedience. He was a stranger to the despotic habits of his day. He wished to create fraternities—that was his expression—in the First Order as well as in the Third. A common deference to truth was to be the centre where hearts and minds should meet.

During his first years he very nearly fulfilled his desire. The Rule was honoured, obedience forestalled commands. If there were some few infractions, they were light ones, and betokened no evil spirit. Nevertheless they disconcerted the holy Founder. He could not help feeling disturbed by them to a certain extent. The instance is given of a brother who, desiring greatly to see him, came to the Portiuncula against obedience and without a companion, thus being doubly in fault. Francis received him with great severity. He told him that he was setting a bad example, and he made him take off his hood, and ordered it to be thrown into the fire. The poor man did not think he had acted so wrongly, and this treatment opened his eyes. He asked pardon, with all the signs of profound grief. Francis was appeased by his repentance. He ordered them to take his hood out of the fire and give it back to him. Wonderful to say, though the scene had lasted some little time, the hood was intact. This is almost the only instance of disobedience recorded by the historians. Happy

<sup>1</sup> Funeral oration for P. Bourgoing, Superior General of the Congregation of the Oratory.

would it have been for the Order had there never been any more serious ones, or if those that did occur had ended so well !

Fourth : Simplicity. Celano thus begins this subject : " Holy simplicity is the daughter of grace, the sister of wisdom, the mother of justice. The Saint omitted no means for obtaining her himself ; he loved her much when he found her with others."

Francis truly believed that where simplicity is, there is grace also. This was why he showed a preference for the poor and lowly. He thought that the fact of their simple condition made them nearer to God and more full of His light. Our Lord said, " I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast revealed these things to little ones." Francis liked this expression. His heart was with them, he would never have consented to allow them to be shut out of the Order he had founded, and he objected to anything that would make them come out of their condition unnecessarily. " Let not those who are unlettered take any trouble to learn," he wrote. We have spoken of the esteem Francis had for knowledge ; we must own that he had not the same respect for the alphabet. Distinction of mind seemed to him to come from a higher source than from a few elementary notions. " The Holy Spirit, who is the superior minister of this religion, rests upon the illiterate and the poor as well as on the learned and the rich," he said. He even reproached himself for not having expressed this sentence in the Rule, that there might always be a place kept for these favourites of our Lord. He wished to rectify this omission, but the Bull of approbation had been already passed and nothing could be added. To make up for this and to give an example that should be a law, he showed a sort of predilection to all these little ones. He used to say when his head was being shaved, " Do not make me a great crown ; I want my simple brethren to see by my head what a place they occupy in my thoughts."

Our readers have perhaps not forgotten the young labourer



named John, who said to Francis "I wish to be like you," and whom Francis had taken back to the Portiuncula. When he was once in the community the good fellow was quite satisfied. He wanted to be like S. Francis, therefore he did everything that he saw him do. If Francis raised his hands to heaven, John raised his hands to heaven. Francis sighed, John sighed. Francis coughed, John coughed. He never lost sight of him for a moment, and copied exactly what he did. Francis soon remarked this behaviour. "What are you doing?" he said to him, and John answered, "I am doing what you do, I want to miss nothing." Francis laughed heartily. He explained to the brother that virtue is not quite such a simple matter as that. John listened, but he never got much beyond his first idea. He returned to God in his simplicity, Celano says. Francis never doubted of his salvation. In speaking of him he did not call him "our Brother John," but "our Brother Saint John." He sometimes held him up as an example, doubtless saying that what he was willing to do for a man, we should endeavour to do for Jesus Christ.

The graceful imagination of Francis liked to make out a relationship between the virtues. We have seen that he gave courtesy as a sister to charity. He gave simplicity as a sister to knowledge. And he thought that these two sisters could only truly work for God when they walked together hand-in-hand. "You flatter yourselves that you convert men," he said to those preachers who were only learned and self-seeking, "but you are mistaken. It is my simple brethren who convert them. You have only Grecian glory, it is not real. You will find yourselves with empty hands at the last day."

Later, he understood that simplicity by itself has only a limited sphere of action. Knowledge must lend her a voice before she can give of her best. He rejoiced when he saw the two sisters advancing hand-in-hand. In that association knowledge seemed to him to be a greater gainer than simplicity. It is then, said he, that she deserves the beauti-

ful name of wisdom ; she has become invincible. Francis composed a short panegyric of some of the virtues. The two sisters open the procession. This is how he addresses them : " I salute thee, O Wisdom, who art the queen. May God preserve thee with thy sister, pure and holy Simplicity."

Finally, he looked on simplicity as the mother of all justice. Its very definition implies this. A soul acts simply when its acts are the result of a pure intention to which it remains faithful till the acts are accomplished. Works performed under these conditions are works of justice. This was S. Francis' aim in all his conduct. He vigilantly guarded the holiness of his thoughts and acts. By nature he was a stranger to duplicity and envy. Ostentation had less and less attraction for him. All such things he left to those who are condemned to perish. Untrammelled by those impediments he turned with a pure impulse to all good, or, which is the same thing, he was, in the words of Celano, *Simplex in omnibus*. Simple in all things.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### HIS LAST TWO YEARS, 1224-26.

WE said that when S. Francis descended from La Vernia he had within him a spring of ardent love. This spring flowed throughout his whole being ; he could hardly contain it, it welled up and burst forth outwardly. If he had lived, what a flood of tenderness might have been poured upon the world ! What an image of the Divine Crucified One he would have been amongst men ! But it was soon evident that the vase which contained that treasure was threatened with speedy destruction. The Stigmata gave the last blow to health that had long been feeble. The frail organisation now existed with difficulty. The stomach could ill bear food, and the internal organs were the seat of constant sufferings ; all the members were weakened and painful.

Francis went back to the Portiuncula, hoping to find some repose there, and he found vexations which added to his sufferings by tormenting his mind. The administration of Brother Elias began to bear fruit. This seems to be a suitable opportunity for making known frankly what appears to be the truth about this famous man. We have said that when Francis took him for his vicar he had two ruling ideas—a filial veneration for the person of the Founder of the Order, whom he looked upon as one raised up by God to do great things, and a hidden but very decided opposition to his ideas, his own ideal being, not the little Portiuncula, but a rich Benedictine Abbey with its political and social influence, and this double character Elias maintained from first to last. This explains all his acts. We have seen him attentive and eager with Francis, we shall find him still more so during the last two years of the Saint's life, and there is no ground for

suspecting his sincerity. On the other hand, he no sooner had the government in his own hands than, without discovering himself, he made use of it to prepare an evolution which he deemed necessary. Poverty at once felt the effects of his policy, and suffered in some degree. The vicar of Francis did not decry it, that would have been impossible, but he diminished its value in the minds of the brethren. His opinions soon permeated those around him. They began saying with him that poverty, carried as far as the Founder carried it, was a new thing, unheard of in the ancient Orders, even in those that were most authorised and most holy. They affirmed that it had its drawbacks ; that the Order would gain a wider field of action if they had more resources, and that they would doubtless one day be obliged to mitigate the existing rigour. What a reversal of all S. Francis' dearest doctrines ! Elias did not stop there ; he systematically removed from the Portiuncula all the firmest representatives of the primitive spirit. Amongst these we must mention first of all S. Antony, who was sent successively from Bologna to Montpellier, from Montpellier to Brives, from Brives to Bourges, further and further from Francis and Italy, whilst those who were inclined to favour the new views were placed and kept in the same functions. These functions, especially that of provincial minister, in opposition to the spirit if not to the letter of the Rule, seem to have become permanent in their hands.

All this was brought about with great skill ; it was impossible to take hold of any direct violation of the Rule. All that the most clear-sighted could perceive was that there was a beginning of troubles in the Order, owing to a manifest relaxation in the love of poverty, and to the creeping in of human ambitions hitherto unknown.

Francis, though aware of the fact, did not discover the source of the evil any more than the others did. Perhaps he may have been less warned of it. He returned the affection of his vicar with the like affection and confidence. He was touched with the proofs of devotion he



received from him. Besides, as regarded his work, he saw that he was full of good qualities. Elias was active, industrious, full of resources as an administrator. The Order grew and prospered in his hands. Francis could not mistrust him. We know that when he did begin to discover symptoms of falling away that he could not mistake, though he suffered cruelly, he was far from attributing their origin to his vicar. Here is a proof. His increasing illness had obliged him to lie in bed. One of the brethren who was taking care of him said to him one day : " My father, why have you almost entirely left off occupying yourself with us, and have given us up to strange hands, as if we no longer belonged to you ? " Francis replied : " I love my brethren as much as I can. If they followed my footsteps better I should love them more, and I should not turn away from them. But there are many, especially amongst the Prelates, who are drawing the Order into new ways. They say they rest upon the example of the ancients, and take no account of my instructions. We shall see what will be the end of such doctrines." He was silent for a short time, then suddenly sitting up in spite of his infirmities, he exclaimed with great vehemence : " Who are these men who have snatched this venerable religion from my hands ? If I am once more permitted to assist at a General Chapter I will make them see what I mean and what is my will." The poor invalid, after these words, fell back upon his bed. The brother wished to hear the end, and he added : " Would you not change all these provincial ministers who for so long have abused the liberty that has been given them ? " " No," replied Francis, " let them live as they will," and to explain himself further, he added these terrible words : " It is better that some should perish than that a great Order should be seriously troubled."

During the succeeding days the holy Founder profited by the hours of respite left him by his malady once more to affirm the principles that were to guide superiors. He said : " It is a good thing and one agreeable to the Lord to govern one's brethren, but there are conditions to be

observed : superiors must not be self-seeking, but must have their eyes ever fixed upon the Divine Will ; putting the salvation of souls in the first place, they must be more anxious for the progress of their brethren than for their approbation ; finally, they must have so sincere a fear of their functions that they will feel humble while they hold them, and triumphant when they are relieved from them." He added that there was no safety without these maxims, and that the reason so many had fallen from their first state was because they had neglected them. " Formerly they were worthy to taste pure and solid joys, and now they have come to feeding themselves miserably on frivolous advantages." He concluded by entreating the Divine mercy to deliver all his disciples from such pernicious error, and to maintain the Order in the grace that had been given to it.

We see that Francis principally blamed the provincial ministers. He held them responsible for all the evil, not thinking that by themselves, without the secret support and connivance of his vicar, they would have been powerless to sustain such ideas.

Not that everything in Brother Elias pleased him. We have already seen what admirable letters on clemency he addressed to him, trying to forewarn him against any despotic tendency. From a conversation that was held at that time we become aware of a much more serious circumstance. Francis did not consider his vicar fitted to succeed him in the government of the Order. The brother who assisted the Saint seems to have been one of those who most clearly saw the situation that was forming itself. He once more brought back the holy Founder to the subject that he had so much at heart. " You will pass away," he said ; " your family will remain in this valley of tears ; who can take charge and direct it after you ? If there be amongst us a sure man on whom your mind rests confidently, let me know it, I conjure you." " My son," replied Francis, with a voice interrupted by sighs, " I see no one around me equal to this task of being shepherd to so vast a flock, but, as they

say, I will draw for you with my pen the portrait of a good superior."

"He must be a man of an amiable disposition, of great discernment, and of good reputation. He must avoid special friendships, lest the affection he might show to some should cause scandal to others. He must love prayer, and must keep certain hours for himself, and others for his flock. The first thing in the morning he should assist at mass, and employ a considerable space of time in asking for the Divine protection for himself and for his flock. After prayer, he belongs of right to those who come to steal his time: let him answer all and provide for everyone and everything with the greatest gentleness. He must avoid all regard to persons, and show the same attention to the small and simple as to the great and learned. Should he have the advantage of being an educated man, let him endeavour above all things to shew forth piety and simplicity; his true strength must be in them. As to money, he must execrate it, for there is no more powerful corrupter of our profession. He is the chief of a poor Order; let him set an example and have no purse belonging to him. One habit and the community book for him, an inkstand, and a seal, to write to the brethren, that is all he needs. Let him not accumulate books, nor read much; he would be defrauding his office by giving time to study,

"Let him console the afflicted, for he is the last refuge of those who are tried; if they find no remedy with him it is to be feared that the weakest may be reduced to despair. If he meets with insolent people let him humble himself to soften them, and let him concede something of his rights to gain a soul to Jesus Christ. He must not shut up his heart against those who have left the Order; they are wandering sheep; he must say to himself that the temptations that led to such a fall must have been terrible.

"I would that all the brethren should honour him as Jesus Christ, and should vie with each other in providing for his wants. And for his part, he must shew that he is pleased

with these attentions ; he must receive respect as he would receive injuries. If through sickness or weakness he requires better food, let him have it, not in secret, but before the brethren, that they may not be ashamed to use the same if they are ill.

“ It is for him to penetrate the secrets of hearts and to draw truth from the most hidden mines, but let him close his ears to great talkers. He must never consent, at any price, to tamper with justice for the sake of keeping in his place. Let him feel that his office is a charge more than an honour. He must avoid all softness that can enervate souls, all weak indulgence that can upset discipline ; he must be loved and at the same time he must be the terror of those who meditate to do evil.

“ I should wish him further to have very honest companions, like him giving an example of all virtue, enemies of pleasure, strong in adversity, and so affable that all who came to the convent should receive a warm welcome. This is what a minister-general of the Order ought to be.”

Of provincial ministers he said, that in their degree they must have the same qualities as the minister-general. They must be affable to the little ones, and so benevolent and self-restrained that those who had done wrong should never fear to have recourse to them ; they must shew great moderation in commanding, be prompt to pardon, and more ready to bear an injury than to return it ; implacable towards vice, but physicians to the vicious.

These conversations are worthy of being attentively considered. They shew us the mind of S. Francis during these two latter years. Some few things concerning persons and facts may have escaped him, but what light he had and shed upon principles !

In spite of these anxieties his sufferings at length abated, and he even regained a little strength. Immediately there was a renewal of energy and courage within him. He thought there was yet a long career open before him. “ Let us begin to serve God,” he said. “ Hitherto we have



done but little." And he formed great plans ; he wished to go back to the simplicity of his first days ; he would consecrate himself again to the service of lepers ; he would go and pray in a solitary place, where, far from the world, there should be between himself and God nothing but the frail barrier of his flesh ; finally, he wished to work for the salvation of souls, and to unite them more closely to God.

This latter project was the one that carried the day ; for we must not suppose that these plans were only the dreams of a sick man flattering himself with hopes. He had vigour enough to recommence his apostolic journeys. Going on foot was out of the question ; therefore he mounted an ass, and rode through the country. The populace welcomed him as a celestial apparition, he looked so pale, transfigured. All he could do was to address a few words to those who flocked around him ; but those words were always full of fire : they went straight to the heart and reanimated their lives, as in the good old days. The success excited Francis. Vainly the brethren entreated him to spare himself ; he raised his noble spirit towards heaven, says Celano, and, like S. Paul, answered that he only wished to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.

Another infirmity came upon him, and obliged him at last to stop. His sight had been failing for some time ; suddenly the shadows deepened, and he could scarcely see at all. Brother Elias was sent for, and came at once ; he made him decide to return to Assisi. Up to that time Francis had refused the assistance of medicine. They could not allow him to be left any longer without remedies. Brother Elias read him the text in Scripture which says that medicine was created by God, and that it is an imprudence to refuse it ; then Francis yielded at once. He agreed to receive the doctors of the place, but their cares did not benefit him much, though they tried several remedies. Then they thought of a certain oculist who had a great reputation, and who lived at Rieti, and they asked Francis if he would go to that town ; he agreed, and they set out.

The Pontifical Court had for some months been established at Rieti, in consequence of one of those insurrections so frequent at that time in Rome. They gave the Saint an almost solemn reception. A certain number of Cardinals, with Cardinal Ugolino at their head, came out to meet him. The whole town was on foot ; no one thought of business, says the historian ; all wished to behold a man who was no longer of this world, and was regarded almost as a saint in heaven. In the midst of acclamations Francis was conducted first to the palace of the Sovereign Pontiff, who received him with paternal kindness ; then to that of the Bishop of Rieti, who, having long known him, claimed the honour of showing him hospitality.

They began at once the treatment of his eyes. The Cardinal, who believed the existence of Francis to be necessary to the Church, continually repeated to him that he must take care of himself, and that he would be committing a sin if he did not do everything that was ordered for him. Francis answered simply that he would resign himself entirely. The oculist first tried bleeding and cauterising, but the result did not answer his expectation. It was evident that the evil was deep-seated, and would require prolonged treatment. Then he had recourse to plasters and collyriums. Meanwhile the Bishop lavished the tenderest care upon his guest. Cardinal Ugolino visited him often, and showed him respect as to an apostle of Jesus Christ. More than once, as we have said, the Prince of the Church was discovered performing humble offices for him, and reverently kissing his hands.

Francis suffered extremely during those first days. It was during a paroxysm of pain at that time that he asked them to sing him a beautiful canticle. At length the plasters brought him some relief, and he was able partly to return to his ordinary life. He even showed unusual concern in a matter that was doubtless out of consideration for his distinguished visitors. He thought his tunic was too shabby. He called the one of his companions whom he

had appointed as his guardian, and said to him : " My brother, I should be much obliged to you if you could find some stuff somewhere to make me a tunic." The brother made a point of satisfying a request as reasonable as it was humbly expressed. He was going out of the palace with this intention, when he found a man sitting at the door, who, seeing him, stood up and said : " My brother, for the love of God, here is stuff for six tunics ; take one for yourself, and do with the rest as you please." The brother immediately returned to announce the gift to Francis. " Take it all," he answered ; " this man has been sent to supply my need. Thanks be to Him who never ceases to take care of us."

In return, he tried to give a soul to God, and a more faithful minister to the Church. There was in the town a canon named Gideon, a worldly ecclesiastic leading a bad life. This poor man was seized with a severe illness, which caused him cruel suffering and paralysed his limbs. In this condition he thought of him whom every one was exalting as having power with God. He had himself carried on a bed into his presence, and entreated him to make the sign of the cross over him. Francis hesitated. He knew the canon's irregularities and could not be sure that suffering had suddenly changed him ; he might be asking for health only that he might return to his sins. Francis could not read clearly in his mind. Pity, and probably the instances of the bishop, prevailed on him, but he thought it right to give the canon a severe admonition. " You have lived long in sin," he said, " without any fear of the divine judgments. How can you ask me to make the sign of the cross over you ? Notwithstanding your unworthiness, I will make this sign, but remember, that if, after being cured you return to your vomit, greater evils will fall upon you, for such chastisement is infallibly reserved for ingratitude." Having said this, he made the sign of the cross over him. Immediately the man, who before had been unable to move, leapt from his bed. " God be praised," he cried, " I am delivered." At the same time,

says the historian, his bones cracked, as dry wood cracks when snapped in two. Unfortunately the good impulse did not last with him. The Saint's fears were realised. The unhappy man, after a very short time, gave himself up to sin again. Then God glorified his servant by accomplishing his prophecy. One evening when the canon had remained to sleep in the house of another with whom he had been dining, the roof of the house fell in upon the inmates. All escaped safe and sound except Gideon, who was smothered under the ruins.

This cure, and the tragic sequel, added yet more to the renown of Francis. The inhabitants of Rieti made all sorts of pretexts for gaining admission to his presence. The Cardinals, by virtue of their high position, paid the Saint long and frequent visits. It was at such times that several of them were able, without his knowledge, to see the Stigmata. Cardinal Conti was one of these. He never forgot the sight. After he had become Pope, under the name of Alexander IV., preaching one day in the presence of a great multitude, amongst whom was S. Bonaventura, he affirmed with much emotion that he had been a witness of the miracle during the Saint's life. The other Cardinals preserved no less vivid a recollection of it. At the canonisation it was they who for the most part composed the antiphons, hymns, and proses, in which this singular favour is celebrated.

The concourse of people about the invalid became so great, that it was feared he would not be able to gain the repose needful for him. By the doctor's advice he left the episcopal palace and was carried to the hermitage of the brethren situated at some distance from the town. He had so often prayed at that place, he was rejoiced to think he would do so once more, and he hoped to find peace and the blessing of God in that holy house. His hopes were not disappointed. He received such grace that he was filled with emotion, and shed abundant tears. The doctor could not fail to notice these tears, and he considered them as hurtful to the eyes. He begged Francis to restrain



them lest he might become quite blind. Francis had resigned himself hitherto to all the remedies, but now it was the question of a divine gift, and he resisted this advice. "No, brother doctor," he said, "for the sake of light which we have in common with flies,<sup>1</sup> I will not resist an effusion of eternal light. The body is for the spirit, the spirit is not for the body."

In spite of this slight disagreement, Francis was much touched by the care and devotion of his doctor. He greatly wished to offer him a token of his gratitude. We saw in a former chapter how he gave him a little feast that was fortunately supplied in a providential manner. But he wished to do more, and God again came to his assistance. The good doctor had just spent all his savings in rebuilding his house. He had been unlucky, for the house was scarcely finished when it began to crack from top to bottom. Ruin was imminent, and new expenses must be incurred. The doctor was unable to afford any more, but he had an inspiration. He had seen the holiness of his patient, and he believed in his power. During one of his visits he asked the brethren to give him something which belonged to Francis, or that he had touched. They gave him a lock of his hair. This he put into the fissures of the building, and the next morning the walls had re-united ; all danger had disappeared.

God not only rewarded those who assisted His servant, but He made him the benefactor of the whole country. When Francis came to the hermitage, one of those epidemics so ruinous to country populations, was raging in the neighbourhood. All domestic animals were attacked by it, and though many remedies had been tried, very few of the beasts could be saved. The poor peasants were in great trouble. One of them, who was more be-

<sup>1</sup> This expression may perhaps have been a reminiscence. "I am surprised," said the hermit S. Antony to the blind man Didymus, "that a sensible man, as you seem to be, should regret those eyes which are common to flies, ants, and the useless animals." S. Francis admired S. Antony. He may have read his life, and if so, it is evident that he had read more than is generally supposed.

loved of God than the rest, thought of going to the convent to ask for the water that had washed the wounds of the holy man. With this water he sprinkled his oxen and sheep which had been attacked like those of his neighbours. Scarcely had the water touched them, when the sick animals revived, got up on their feet and went into the meadow to graze as if nothing had happened. The miracle was reported in the village, then in the whole district. The poor people came in crowds to ask for the water. Some of it was given to everybody without the knowledge of Francis. The result was always the same. In a few days the pestilence had entirely disappeared from the district. S. Bonaventura, who relates the fact, tells us nothing about the joy of those fortunate peasants, but those who know them may imagine their delight.

But though he cured the animals, he did not cure himself. Weeks and months went by and there was no amelioration in his state ; it even became aggravated. At last the day came when the doctor declared that his science had come to an end ; he did not think the invalid's state was desperate, but he confessed that he did not know what more to attempt, and advised him to go to Siena where there was a very old and celebrated oculist who might perhaps do something for him. The Saint was consulted, and it was decided to follow the doctor's advice.

The company took the road to Siena. Francis was at its head mounted on an ass, the doctor of Rieti, who insisted on going with him, was beside him on horseback. On the height of Rocca di Campiglia, between Radicofani and S. Cyr, an incident occurred which greatly astonished the party. Three young girls, very poorly dressed, suddenly appeared before them. They were exactly alike, of the same height, and the same age. Celano says, one might have thought they all came out of the same mould. They stood hand in hand. "Welcome, Madam Poverty," they said, bowing low before the Saint. This new kind of salutation delighted Francis. Nothing could have pleased him more

than to be thus taken for poverty in person. Thinking they were young girls, he turned to the doctor, saying, "For the love of God, let us give them something." The doctor dismounted and gave an alms to all three. After they had resumed their journey, the doctor and the brethren looked back to see the pretty messengers once more, but they perceived no one. This rapid disappearance, after so extraordinary a salutation, made them reflect. They suspected there was some mystery beneath it, for they said, women do not appear and disappear like birds. Celano ends with this reflection. S. Bonaventura goes a little further: he adds that these three young girls so like each other, demonstrate that in Francis evangelical perfection was equal from the point of view of chastity, obedience, and poverty.

The oculist of Siena, as soon as he heard that the Saint had arrived in the convent at the gate of the city, came to visit him, and made use of all his science to gain a clear understanding of his case. After an examination, he declared, like the doctor at Rieti, that all hope was not lost, but that strong measures must be employed if any good result was to be obtained. In the first place the patient must be cauterised from the eyebrows to the ears. Francis took this opportunity for showing courage. He said that he was ready to undergo what they proposed. The surgeon was sent for, and he began heating his irons in the fire. When the Saint saw the instrument reddening in the flames, an involuntary shudder passed through him; he felt that his heart needed strengthening. Then he said: "My brother fire, amongst all beautiful things the Lord has created thee beautiful, strong, and useful. Be gentle to me in this hour; be courteous, for I have always loved thee in the Lord. May God who created thee temper thine ardour that I may be able to bear it." Having said this he made the sign of the cross over the burning iron, and gave himself into the surgeon's hands. The instrument was pressed upon the tender flesh, without one movement on the patient's part.

The brethren, horrified at the operation, had fled at the beginning of it. Francis called them back and said with a smile: "Faint-hearted cowards, why have you run away? I tell you in truth the iron did not hurt me: I felt no pain." And turning to the doctor he said, "If my flesh is not cooked enough you can begin again." The doctor, knowing how frightened most people are at such operations, could not restrain an exclamation of admiration. "My brethren," he said, "this day I have seen wonders."

The operation, at least for a little while, had the effect anticipated. Francis seemed to regain his sight, and his general health improved in proportion. It was the beginning of winter, and it was decided that he should pass this season in the convent at Siena. The doctor recommended the greatest precautions, prescribed for the patient almost absolute repose, and a strengthening diet.

Francis was rather disturbed by these attentions; he tried to believe them necessary, but could not reconcile them with his desire for mortification. He consulted one of the brethren, whose advice he knew he could depend on. "My dear son," he said, "what do you advise? My conscience continues to murmur concerning the care which I have to bestow on my body. It fears that I may become too self-indulgent. Not that sensuality is much to be feared, however; I have no longer any taste for all those infirmities." The good son replied: "Tell me, my father, how did your body obey the will of your spirit when it had the power." "Oh, I can give it this testimony," answered Francis; "it obeyed well, it did not spare itself, it was the first to run to the desired goal. It and I have always understood each other thoroughly in serving Christ, our Saviour." "Well, my father," replied the brother, "if this is so, where is your generosity? where is your exact appreciation of things? Between friends, does anyone receive benefits and never think of returning them? You own that in the service of God your body has exposed itself to all kinds of danger, and now you would refuse to help it when it is in necessity.



Ah, my father! you who are the staff and the support of the afflicted, you will not commit such a sin before God." "Blessed art thou, my son," said Francis. "Thou hast wisely answered the questions that troubled me," and addressing his body cheerfully, he said: "Brother body, rejoice, but have some consideration for me, I beg, for I am henceforth going to do everything thou desirest. I will run to help thee as soon as I hear thee make the smallest complaint." He added courteously that he asked pardon of it for the sins he had committed against it in the past.

Notwithstanding these promises, there was no fear that Francis would become entirely preoccupied by his health. His mind remained whole. His soul kept up all its usual habits, and, according to Celano, it carried into them all its former ardour. For instance, he always devoted a considerable time to meditation and prayer. One of his sayings, which, if we are not mistaken, dates from this period, enables us to understand something of his method in prayer in those latter days. He had never helped himself much by reading, and he did so still less now; he was satisfied with meditating in his heart on the truths he had already learned. One day when he was suffering greatly, one of his companions said to him: "My father, you have often turned to the Holy Scriptures and have always found in them relief for your troubles. Would you like to hear something read to you from the prophets? Perhaps your spirit might find consolation in the Lord at hearing such reading." "I thank you," replied Francis; "it is good to read Holy Scripture and to seek our Lord God in it, but I have read it so much that I can recall to mind what I know. I know Jesus Christ poor and crucified, and that is enough." His historian says that he had a memory which retained everything. This memory served him for a book, and furnished him with the principles and facts he needed on every subject. Like all true meditative minds, he nourished himself on this food. "The important thing is, not to have under-

stood a great number of truths, but sincerely to love each truth, to let each one penetrate the heart by degrees, to let it rest there, to have the same object in view for a long time, and to unite oneself to it more by the sentiment of the heart than by subtile reflections.”<sup>1</sup> This was the practice of S. Francis.

After prayer he was ready to give a little time to pious conversation. He conversed with his children in a pleasant informal manner, and received some visits from outside. It was during this winter that he had the interview with the Dominican, to whom he explained the text in Ezekiel. This same religious came several times to visit him.

One day he arrived at the convent rather troubled by a prediction that Francis had made to one of his friends. “Did you really say that?” he asked. “Yes,” replied Francis, “I did say it, and I am going to say something more to you.” Then, as though to gain his confidence, he revealed to him a side of his inner life which the Father had never opened to anyone, and gave him wise advice on the subject; then he came to the real object of the communication he wished to make to him; he invited him to prepare himself in a holy manner for death, which was approaching, and the details of which he prophetically described to him. The religious believed his friend’s word, thanked him, and retired to shut himself up in retreat. He did rightly, for all happened as Francis had foretold.

The winter passed away with alternations of good and bad health. Spring was drawing near. The brethren were hoping for all the advantages of a milder season for their beloved Father, when in the early days of April Francis was seized with such violent vomiting of blood that they thought his end had come. They sent hastily for Brother Elias, who had gone to a distance in the service of the Order. Brother Elias made all the haste he could. When he arrived the danger was past, the invalid seemed even better than he was before, as if the blood he had got rid of had

<sup>1</sup> Fénelon “Entretien sur la vie religieuse,” ed. Lebel, tom. xvii., p. 421.

relieved his system. He showed great pleasure at seeing his vicar again, and after a few days spent with him he said he felt well enough to be moved to Cortona. They acceded to his desire, though the journey presented some difficulty. Two valleys separate Siena from Cortona; the road is constantly up and down hill. Francis set out valiantly, and God soon softened his fatigue by sending him a good work to do. As they approached Volusiano, a young lady, the wife of the baron of the place, hearing that he was passing by, ran out on the road and came to him breathless. Francis seeing her thus, was moved with compassion; he said to her courteously: "What is it you want, madam?" She answered: "I want you to bless me." "Are you married?" replied Francis. "Yes," she said, "but my husband is very stern, he sets himself against my serving Jesus Christ. My great trouble is that having received a right will from heaven, I cannot follow it on account of him. I entreat you to pray that God will soften his heart." Francis was filled with admiration at these holy sentiments; he turned to her with great kindness: "My blessed daughter," he said, "go, and be assured that your husband will become your consolation. Tell him this from God and from me: now is the time of salvation, the time of recompense will soon come." Then he gave her his benediction. The lady went back, and finding her husband, she repeated the Saint's words to him. The effect was instantaneous. The Spirit of God took possession of the man and changed all his sentiments. He said to his wife: "Madam, the Saint is right, let us serve God together and save our souls in our own house." "Oh, God be praised!" she exclaimed; "but do you not think that a state of continence ought to be the foundation of this new life? The other virtues will be given to us in due time." "I think as you do," answered the husband. They lived thus for a great many years, and passed to a better life on the same day, one in the morning the other in the evening. "Where are now," continues the pious historian, "the women who gain the admiration of

Saints, and sanctify themselves and their husbands' soul at the same time?"

At last they entered Cortona. The town, like all the rest of the country, was full of the report of the holiness of Francis. The people knew that he was ill, and they gave him the most respectful welcome. A few hours after his arrival there came to him a brother whom he tenderly loved. This was the young man Guido, who had been born with a vocation to the Order, and to whom Francis gave the habit in 1211. He had greatly increased in virtue. He now came, full of anxiety from what he had heard, to inform himself of the Father's health. Francis welcomed him kindly, reassured him, and invited him to stay the night in the house where he was receiving hospitality, and said that the next day they would go together to the Convent of the *Cells*, where he wished to stay. They were preparing to start, when Francis was asked to address an exhortation to the crowd. He said a few words to them, and then they set out and reached one of the gates of the city. There the guards stopped them, saying that they had orders to prevent them passing. The explanation of this conduct is that the magistrates had reasoned in a way that no one would think of doing in these days, but which was not uncommon at that time. Seeing how weak Francis was, they thought he could not last much longer, and that if they could only keep him for a few days, they would have his sacred remains, and they would be a glory to their city. To stop him at the gates was the first step in this project. Francis was not disconcerted. He turned back, and announced that the next day he would preach a little sermon in the parish cemetery. The people came in crowds. Francis stood upon a stone to preach.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the discourse he thus introduced the subject which

<sup>1</sup> This stone was immediately regarded as sacred. It was reduced to powder, and they made with it a mortar with which they cemented the flags of the pavement in the Church of La Pieve, which was then being built. What piety and what poetry these people shewed!



filled all minds : “ Noble citizens, know that it is the Divine Will that I should spend my last days near S. Mary of the Angels at Assisi. But I can tell you this : you will have Brother Guido in my place, and I recommend him to you with all my heart ; and I know that, by God’s grace and his own merits, the town of Cortona and its inhabitants will be delivered from many evils.” The proposed exchange was accepted ; the magistrates withdrew the interdict, and Francis could go to the Convent of the *Cells*.

There he stayed two months, dividing his time between meditation, prayer, and some conversation. Most probably he employed part of these days, the last of those that were free from great suffering, in reconsidering the paths he had followed, and in turning his thoughts towards the future of his Order. The testament that he gave to his brethren in the last period of his illness is full of these two subjects. Everything points to its having been written at the Cells of Cortona during this last visit. Francis knew, from the apparition that had come to Brother Elias, that his days were numbered, and that death was approaching rapidly.

The symptoms of its speedy arrival soon manifested themselves. Dropsy set in, and fever took possession of his body ; his legs swelled, and his stomach became incapable of bearing food. He knew that this time the axe was laid at the root of the tree. He asked to be taken back to his native city. He wished, he said, to give up the breath of his mortal life in the sanctuary where he had received the breath of grace.

They at once acceded to his desire. Two roads lead to Assisi from Cortona. The shorter and easier passes through the valley of Umbria, at the foot of Perugia. Brother Elias dared not take it, for he feared the Perugians might keep Francis, as the people of Cortona had tried to do. He therefore chose the other, thinking it the safer of the two, though it was longer and more difficult, and would add to the fatigue of the invalid. The little company travelled very slowly, and with great precaution. On reach-

ing Nocera, Elias sent an express to Assisi to tell the magistrates that he had reason for fearing an attack from the Perugians, and asking them to send an escort to bring the Saint into Assisi. The magistrates, much affected, lost not a moment, and sent armed men on horseback, chosen partly from amongst the nobles and partly from the principal burgesses. On their arrival the party set out again. Assisi was not far off, but, in order to spare the invalid from fatigue, they stopped at a poor little mountain village, called Satriano. Here Francis once more found an opportunity for showing the power of his beloved poverty. The men of the escort, wanting food, had spread themselves about the village, to buy provisions. The inhabitants refused to sell them any. "We are not shopkeepers," said these peasants. The men came back and told Francis of their ill-luck. "We are reduced to living upon your alms," they said. "We cannot find anything to buy." "You have found nothing," replied Francis, "because you have trusted in your flies more than in God (he called their money 'flies'). But return where you have been, and, instead of offering money, ask for the love of God. Do not be ashamed; since sin came into the world, all we have is alms; worthy or unworthy, it is from the inexhaustible liberality of the great Almoner that we receive what we call our possessions." The good knights took courage, and, like beggars, asked alms, for the love of God. The people gave them willingly all that they wanted.

After this short halt, they reached Assisi in one stage. Francis made his entrance in the midst of the joy mingled with sadness of the populace. Since they could no longer hope to keep him, they thought themselves fortunate to have at least the assurance that his precious remains would repose in Assisi. "The city rejoiced at the approach of the blessed Father," says Celano; "every tongue praised God, because the multitude was convinced that the holy man was about to die soon."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HIS DEATH, 1226.

THE Bishop of Assisi was one of the first to go to him whom he had always liked to call his son. When he saw what ravages illness had made in the Saint's whole appearance, he knew that it would be impossible to give him all the care he needed in a narrow cell at the Portiuncula. He therefore pressed him to accept hospitality in one of the rooms of his palace. Francis was full of deference and affection towards the Bishop, and willingly accepted what he knew was willingly offered.<sup>1</sup>

It soon became evident that not only they could not cure him, but that the catastrophe could not long be averted. The swelling that had begun at Cortona suddenly changed into extraordinary emaciation. The poor invalid was reduced to skin and bones. He could not make the smallest movement without the most terrible effort. His weakness was so great that the doctors declared they could not understand how his life was maintained. His eyes were enveloped in thick shadows, through which he could hardly distinguish light from darkness.

In this state of weakness sensation alone remained ; every part of his body was the seat of sharp pains. It was martyrdom, and more than martyrdom. He was forced to acknowledge it to one of his companions, who, seeing him suffering these tortures, said to him, " My father, do you not think you would suffer less under the hands of an executioner ? "—" My brother," he answered, " my dearest and

<sup>1</sup> There may have been some calculation in this hospitality. The Bishop's palace was in the town. They thought the Saint would there be more secure from an attack than at the Portiuncula in the open valley.

sweetest wish has always been, and still is, to do what God demands of me: with all my soul I desire to conform myself in all things to His pleasure and will. But martyrdom would be less difficult to bear than three days of this illness." He added modestly, "I am speaking of the suffering it brings, not of the recompense it merits."

Whatever his modesty may have thought, God permitted him this last trial that his glory might be the greater afterwards. His historians say that the Almighty had a design of goodness in letting his end be as rough as his beginning had been. His Divine Friend took care to reveal that secret to him, for if He allowed pain to rack his body, He never deprived his soul of the sweet intimacy with Himself to which the Saint was accustomed. One night when Francis was pitying himself in the great access of pain he was enduring, our Lord said to him: "Thou art suffering, but suppose that for these sufferings, so great a weight of glory was given thee, that all the gold in the world would be nothing in comparison with it, wouldest thou not receive them joyfully?" "Oh, yes," answered the Saint, "joyfully, most joyfully." "Well then, open thy heart to that joy, for thy infirmity is a pledge of the inheritance reserved for thee; on account of it, thou mayest confidently expect the kingdom I have prepared for thee."

Fortified by this assurance, Francis seemed to rise above himself. He upheld the shield of patience with a firm hand. His soul bore the most violent assaults without flinching. It even became serene and vigorous. He would not have his pains called torments any more, he gave them the name of sisters, and pronounced the word tenderly. In truth he loved them. Those who were near him suffered in seeing him suffer, and he remained calm, affable, smiling. He asked them to sing him his Song of the Creatures. He had always liked to hear it sung with grace and fervour, and he still had strength enough to enjoy it once more. It was his farewell to Nature, whom he was about to leave, and his salutation to death that was approaching. For he did



not deceive himself, he knew that his malady was incurable.

Still he was able to think of those whom he was leaving behind him in the world. Some of them were especially dear to him. He sent for them one after another, blessed them, and found a word to say to each, as it was given to him by the Lord. It was like Jacob blessing all his sons. After paying this tribute to friendship, he expressed a desire to be surrounded by the whole community. The brethren came in and arranged themselves in a circle. Brother Elias knelt on the left side of the bed. Wishing to bless them all, Francis crossed his hands, and stretched them out. His right hand touched the head of Elias. "Who is my hand touching?" he asked, for he could not see. "It is touching the head of Elias." "That is well," he replied. "My son, I bless thee in all and for all. As by thy hands the Most High has multiplied my brethren and my sons, so do I bless them all in thee and on thee. May God, the Lord of all things, bless thee in heaven and on earth. For myself I bless thee as much as and more than I can. May He who can do all things supply what I cannot do, may He remember thy labour and thy work, may He hear all thy prayers, and on the day of recompense may thy place be amongst the just." After this effusion, into which he seems to have put all that was in him, appreciation, gratitude, and a tenderness that touched upon his hidden anxieties, Francis turned towards the other brethren: "Farewell, my dear sons," he said; "keep the fear of the Lord, abide ever in Jesus Christ. Bad days are coming. You will pass through a terrible trial. Happy are they who shall persevere in what they have begun! Many will fall away on account of scandals. I am going to God: I have served him devotedly and with my whole soul. I leave this world full of confidence. May His grace abide with you."

A less solemn, but yet a very touching scene, shows how even in this extremity Francis attended to the wishes of his brethren. They used to watch with him by turns. Brother

Leo, as the Saint's confessor, had a special right to this office, and he often claimed it. One night when he was fulfilling it, he had a thought in which the reader will easily recognise God's tender and timid little lamb. His Father was there before him, motionless, lying on his poor bed, breathing with difficulty. He did not lose sight of him for a moment. The following wish came into his mind : " He will die soon ; my life will be desolate. It would be a great consolation if I could have the tunic he is wearing at this moment." This good son thought that his soul would be less cold afterwards if he could wrap his body in that precious relic, but he was too reserved to express such a thought. Francis was obliged to meet him half way, as he had often done before. " My son," he said, beckoning him to approach, " I give thee my tunic ; consider it as thine. I will continue to wear it during the few days that I have yet to live ; it shall be given to thee directly after my death." Brother Leo burst into tears, his heart divided between admiration and gratitude.

But the weeks were gliding by ; the month of October was near. Francis was not much worse ; there was even a slight amelioration in his condition, his sufferings were somewhat less. He profited by the respite to ask the Bishop of Assisi to let him be carried to the Portiuncula. His constant idea was that he must die near his beloved chapel where God had revealed Himself to him. The Bishop, who was about to start on a pilgrimage to Mount Gargano, saw no reason for refusing his request. The invalid was placed on a litter, and they slowly descended the mountain. When they reached the valley he said : " Turn me round towards the town," and sitting up with an effort, he gazed on Assisi for the last time, and pronounced these solemn words : " Be blessed of the Lord, O town faithful to God, for many souls shall be saved in you and by you. A great number of servants of the Most High will live in your neighbourhood, and many of your citizens will be chosen to eternal life. Peace be with you." His loving soul could not have been satisfied if he

had not taken leave of his native town and wished it the blessing of God.

He showed the greatest joy at once more beholding the Portiuncula from which he had been absent for nearly two years. He made them carry him before the altar of the Holy Virgin, where he wished to pray for the last time. "O my children," he said to those who surrounded him, "never abandon this place. If they drive you away on one side, return on the other ; it is truly a holy place ; God has placed His dwelling in it. Here the Almighty multiplied us when we were few in number ; here He illuminated the minds of His poor ones with the light of wisdom ; here He inflamed our hearts with the fire of His love. He who shall here pray devoutly will obtain what he asks, and he who sins will be punished the more rigorously. O my children, have great veneration for this holy house, and sing in it the praises of the Lord fervently and joyfully." He repeated this sweet advice several times. The brethren felt that his whole heart was in it.

He thought that the time had now come for him to make known his will. He had his testament read to the assembled brethren, the one he had written lately, either at Siena or Cortona, as we have mentioned. It is too important a document to be omitted from this history. In it appears the idea which ruled the Saint's whole life, infusing it with the energy of a Founder and one inspired. Doubtless he had drawn it up carefully as an answer to the hidden attacks against his work. In deferring its publication till this moment, he may have thought that it would acquire a degree of sacredness and solemnity from his death-bed.<sup>1</sup>

"The Lord gave to me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance. When I was in a state of sin, it seemed very bitter to me to behold lepers, but the Lord Himself led me amongst them, and I shewed them mercy. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into

<sup>1</sup> We know from the Bull of Gregory IX. (*Quo elongati, etc.*), that the Saint's testament was published a few days only before his death. All the historians mention it ; it is a document of the highest authority.

sweetness to my soul and body. After that, I remained but a short time in the world. I came out of it, and the Lord gave me such faith in His churches that I simply adored Him and said: 'We adore Thee, O Most Holy Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all Thy churches which are in all the world, and we bless Thee because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.'

"He gave me besides, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the form of the Holy Roman Church, because of their Orders, that if they persecuted me I would still turn to them. And if I had as much wisdom as Solomon had, if I found poor priests in any place, I would not preach in their churches against their will. I will fear, love and honour them and all others as my masters. I will not consider sin in them, because I see in them the Son of God, and they are my lords. This I do because in this world I behold nothing material of the Most High Son of God except His Most Holy Body and Blood, which they receive and alone administer to others.

I will that these most holy mysteries be honoured and revered above all things, and that they be placed in precious tabernacles. Wherever I find the most holy names and words of Jesus Christ in writing, lying in unseemly places, I will collect them, and I pray others to collect them that they may be put in a decent place. And we must honour and revere all theologians, and those who minister to us the most holy Word of God, as men who minister to us spirit and life.

"After the Lord gave me the care of my brethren, no one taught me what to do, but the Almighty Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had a Rule written in few and simple words, and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. Those who came to receive this life gave to the poor all that they had, and were content with one tunic patched within and without, a girdle of cord, and breeches, and we wished for nothing more.

"We clerks said the Office as other clerks do, the lay brothers said the *Pater Noster*. We stayed willingly in small neglected churches, and we were simple and subject to all men.

"I laboured with my hands, and I will labour, and I wish firmly that all my brethren should work at some honest labour. Let those who do not know how to work, learn, not with the desire of being recompensed, but for the sake of good example and for repelling idleness. If we are not paid the price of our labour, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, asking alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me this salutation, that we should say: The Lord give thee peace.

"Let the brethren beware that they never receive churches, houses, or buildings made for them, except in so far as such things are in conformity with the holy poverty we have professed in the Rule; and they must dwell in such places as strangers and pilgrims. I strictly forbid by obedience that any of the brethren, wherever they may be, should



dare, either themselves or by means of another, to demand any letter in the Roman Curia, either for a church or for any other place, nor, under pretext of preaching, nor even for the security of their persons in case of persecution, but if they are not received in one place let them hasten to another, there to do penance with the blessing of God.

“I will unreservedly obey the Minister-General of this fraternity and the guardian whom he may be pleased to give me. And I will be so captive in his hands, that I can neither go nor do anything against his will, for he is my master.

“Being simple and infirm, I wish always to have a clerk, who will say the Office with me, as the Rule requires. Let all the other brethren be bound in the same way to obey their guardians and to say the Office according to the Rule. If there should be any who do not say the Office according to Rule, or who wish to introduce changes, or who are not Catholics, let the other brethren, wherever they may be, if they find one such, be bound by obedience to guard him day and night as a prisoner, so that he may not be taken out of their hands until they can give him up in person into the hands of his minister. And the minister must also be bound by obedience to send him with brethren who shall guard him night and day as a prisoner, unto the Cardinal of Ostia, who is Master, Protector, and Corrector of this fraternity.

“The brethren must not say: this is another Rule—it is a memorial, an admonition, and exhortation; it is my testament, which I, your little Brother Francis, address to you my blessed brethren, that we may observe the Rule which we have promised our Lord to keep, in a more Catholic manner.

“The Minister-General and all the other ministers and guardians are bound by obedience to add nothing to these words, nor to diminish ought from them. Let them have this writing, joined to the Rule, always with them, and in all the Chapters they hold, when they read the Rule, they must read these words also.

“I absolutely forbid, and that by obedience, all my brethren, whether clerks or laymen, to put glosses on the Rule and on this writing, saying: ‘Thus it ought to be understood.’ But as the Lord has given me grace to dictate them and write them purely and simply, understand them thus simply and without gloss, and put them in practice with holy acts unto the end.

“Whoever shall observe these things may he be filled in heaven with the benediction of the Heavenly Father, and on earth with the benediction of His well beloved Son, and of the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, and of all the Celestial Powers, and all the Saints, and I, Brother Francis, your little servant, I confirm on you as much as I can this holy benediction within and without. Amen.”

It would have been difficult to point out more authori-

tatively the path that was to be followed. Happy at having accomplished this last duty, Francis considered his task finished, and began to retire within himself. He wished to show by an external act that he had now nothing more in common with the world. He had ashes strewn on the floor of his cell, with great difficulty he stripped off his tunic, and, assisted by those who were with him, he laid himself naked upon the bare ground. In this state, which doubtless reminded him of our Lord's being stripped of his garments upon the Cross, and of his own casting off of his clothes the day he entered upon his vocation, he kept his eyes raised to heaven, while with his hands he hid the wound in his side for fear it might be seen. "I have done my work," he said to his brethren; "may Jesus Christ teach you yours." At these words all hearts were broken; for some time nothing was heard but sobs and cries of grief.

When they had a little recovered themselves, the one who was then the Saint's guardian, thinking he saw what was passing in his mind, took up the clothes he had laid aside, and said, offering them to him: "My Father, I lend you these clothes, and in the name of obedience I command you to accept them; but to prove completely that they are not yours, I take from you all permission to lend them." Francis heard this command with evident joy. He had kept his faith with Madam Poverty to the end, for the guardian had not been mistaken, that was his idea when he stripped himself. After assisting him to dress again, they replaced him gently on the bed. He raised his hands to heaven and cried: "Now, O Christ, I have nothing to keep me back; I shall go freely to Thee."

His condition grew worse. He was devoured by fever. One night when it was raging within him, he thought that a little parsley might refresh him, and he humbly asked for some. The brother in charge of the kitchen, to whom the request was communicated, was not very eager to satisfy it. "I have gathered a great deal to-day," he said; "I could hardly find any more in the daylight, how am I to find it in the dark?" Francis sent for him. "Go, my brother,"

"and take this trouble, bring me the first herbs that come to hand." The cook did as he was told ; he pulled up the first thing he found, and came back with a large bundle of herbs of different kinds. The brethren began to sort them, and soon found several fresh tufts of excellent parsley. Francis ate them and was much relieved. "My brethren," he said to those around him, "always obey the first word. Do not wait for a command to be repeated. Do not say it is impossible. If I commanded you something beyond your strength obedience would give you the strength that you had not in yourselves."

With the exception of this incident there now reigned in the cell that religious silence which the approach of death imposes on all men. The brethren avoided all noise, and hardly allowed themselves to move. They dared not speak to him except by their affectionate looks and the sadness of their countenances. He well understood this language. The faithful imitator of our Lord, having loved His own which were in the world, he, too, loved them to the end. He could still give expression to his tender feelings. Once he spoke of Clara and her sisters. He repeated that he had loved them sincerely, and begged the brethren never to cease caring for their spiritual interests. Another time he made all the brethren sit around him and gave them a little address of consolation, and invited them to love God well and to be attached to poverty and patience. For some time he had not spoken at all of the Order ; he feared, says Celano, to hear something which would renew his sorrow. Now he once more approached this painful subject. Alluding to the reasons that had been given for rejecting poverty in the form he had established it, he said : "Doubtless there are other Rules, but we must put the Gospel and its maxims above all the rest." He spoke to them also of the necessity of abiding in the faith of the Roman Church. Finally, he wished to bless them once more. He crossed his arms, as he loved to do, and laying his hands on each one of them, beginning with his vicar, he blessed them, and in their

persons blessed all those who were dispersed in the Church. Celano says he even included in his benedictions those who should enter the Order till the end of time. His tenderness overflowed and spread abroad like the Providence of God.

He had another still more touching inspiration. His thoughts, his looks, his heart followed our Lord step by step in his last days and in the last acts of his mortal life. He thought of the Passover that the Saviour had eaten with His disciples before His death. This union, or rather communion, of the Master with His disciples, moved him to tears, and he desired to commemorate that solemn act. He had bread brought to him, blessed it, broke it, and gave a piece to each one that he might eat it. Francis was not a priest; he knew that what he was giving was only a memorial, a symbol, but this memorial seemed to him to have its own value and virtue. When the brethren had eaten the bread, he looked tenderly on them, he felt they were in closer union with each other.<sup>1</sup> The remainder of

<sup>1</sup> The touching example given by S. Francis was imitated in the Order. In the *Life of the Blessed Louisa of Savoy* we read: "And because it was the hour of vespers she remembered the holy Supper of our Lord, and she seemed as though in rapture, and a great devotion to do the like came to her, and she said to us: My sisters, we must make our Supper. . . . Then she took her glass and signed and blessed it after they had put a little wine therein, and said: This is the hour in which our Lord made His blessed Supper with His blessed apostles, and in sign of love and charity gave it to all, saying: Take, receive, and drink the wine of the true vine. Then she took the glass and signed it and drank, saying: This is my last drink; and she said many fervent and devout words that our Lord said at His blessed Supper. But we were in such great admiration at beholding her in such marvellous devotion, that we do not know how to say all that she said and did, which would be a most devout thing to hear. Then she gave the glass to the Mother Abbess and the sisters, saying: Drink all of this fruit of the true vine. And while making this devout remembrance, she seemed to be quite enraptured in God, and it was a most devout and marvellous thing to see, so pleasant and beautiful she was to look upon. When she had finished this devout representation, she recovered herself and said: Pardon me, my sisters, it did not belong to me to do this, but it came before me to do so, and I had never thought before of doing it, but it came thus to me, without my proposing it. Then she said: Farewell, my much loved sisters, I am going to Paradise. It is very beautiful there!"—"Life of the most high, powerful, and illustrious lady, Madame Loyse of Savoy, Religious in the Convent of Madame S. Claire d'Orbe." Geneva: Fick.



the day was full of sweetness to him. He gave thanks continually. He asked two of the brethren, the two who were perhaps the dearest to him of all, to sing him once more his Song of the Creatures. He spoke of death with the greatest tenderness. "Welcome, my sister death," and he said to his doctor, "Tell me that I must die, for death will open to me the gate of life."

It was the last bright ray, the star was to set in light. Francis felt the end was near, and he gave the brethren one last injunction. "As soon as you see me in extremity," he said, "lay me naked on the bare ground, as you saw me lying some days ago, and when I am dead, leave me in that state for the space of time that it would take a man to go a mile walking slowly." It was another point of resemblance to the Saviour, who, after his death, remained some time on the cross before He was taken down to be buried. "What an admirable Christian!" exclaims S. Bonaventura, "who in life, and even in death, sought but one thing; to be conformed to Jesus Christ!"

One of those whom he loved, seeing that his moments were numbered, bent over him. "My father," he said, "your sons will have no father! In you we lose the light of our life. Never forget those whom you leave orphans in this world. And now forgive both those present and those absent for all the sins they have committed. Bless them once more." "My son," replied the Saint, "God is calling me; I forgive my brethren, those present and those absent, all their sins and faults. I absolve them as much as I can; tell them so and bless them in my name."

Francis now sent for the book of the Gospels, and asked them to read him the Gospel of S. John where the history of the Passion opens with these words: "Before the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father. . . ." He listened to this reading with the greatest attention, without interrupting it by a single word. Every death is a sacrifice. Feeling this truth forcibly after the history he had just heard read, he

ordered them to wrap him in a hair cloth and cover him with ashes. This they did, then he began the sad chant of the Psalmist :

“ I cried to the Lord with my voice ; with my voice I made supplication to the Lord.

In his sight I pour out my prayers, and before him I declare my trouble.

When my spirit failed me, then thou knewest my paths.

In this way wherein I walked, they have hidden a snare for me.

I looked on my right hand and beheld, and there was no one that would know me.

Flight hath failed me ; and there is no one that hath regard to my soul.

I cried to thee, O Lord, I said : thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living.

Attend to my supplication, for I am brought very low.

Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name ; the just wait for me until thou reward me.” (Ps. 141.)

When he had recited the last verse, all the mysteries of Christ were accomplished in him, and his holy soul escaped from its earthly bonds and was absorbed in the divine light : his body slept peacefully in the Lord.

The fifty brethren who were then at the Portiuncula surrounded his death-bed, awaiting the last moment on their knees, divided between prayer, the religious impressiveness of that solemn hour, and the grief of losing a beloved father, an incomparable master. Although the evening twilight had begun to fall, a great number of larks,<sup>1</sup> birds which love the light and dread darkness, came and settled on the roof and fluttered about joyfully for a long time, as if to do homage to the Saint who had so often invited them to sing the divine praises.

This glorious death took place on Saturday, October 3rd, 1226. S. Francis a few days before had entered his forty-sixth year. It was twenty years since he received the Order from Jesus Christ to repair His church, and eighteen since he founded the Order of Minors.

<sup>1</sup> *S. Bon.*, p. 396.

His departure from this world was known at a distance even before the news of it had reached Assisi. One of his best companions, Brother Augustine of the Terra di Lavoro, was dying. He had already lost the power of speech. Suddenly he seemed to awaken from a profound sleep, and he cried out: "O my father, wait for me, wait for me; I am going with you." The brethren beside him asked him to whom he was speaking. "Do you not see," he said in a firm voice, "our father Francis going to heaven?" At the same moment his soul passed away and followed that of his father.

The holy soul appeared also to the Bishop of Assisi. He had always been the protector of S. Francis, and in his last illness he had bestowed the greatest attentions on him; at this very time he was hastening back from Mount Gargano to see him once more in this world. Courteous in death, as he had been in life, the Saint desired to take leave of his benefactor and friend. He appeared before the Bishop at Benevento, where he had arrived. "My father," he said, "I am leaving this world and am going to Jesus Christ." The prelate related the vision to those who accompanied him, and on his return, upon enquiry he found that it had taken place at the same time as the Saint's death.

The body lay upon the ashes for the space of time Francis had fixed. The brethren passed this first hour much in the same state in which they were when the Saint drew his last breath. Two years afterwards, Thomas of Celano, who was one of those present, found the sentiments he then had in his soul still warm and vigorous. "O true light of the world," he cried, "thou who didst shine in the Church of Christ with greater brilliance than the sun, we shall behold thy rays no more. Thou hast exchanged our poor society for the society of angels and saints. But we entreat thee, who didst so gloriously announce to us the good tidings, now that thou hast put off our flesh, not to cease to care for us. Thou knowest better than any one, in

what a sad state we are left. Thy blessed presence alone could uplift us at all times in our trouble and anguish. Most holy father, how merciful thou wast. Thou wast always ready to help thy children. We bless thee, as that God who is blessed above all things has blessed thee."

But it was time to think of paying the last duties to the glorious dead. The brethren washed the body, and having anointed it with precious essences, they exposed it to the veneration of all, on a magnificent piece of tapestry that, as well as the perfumes, had been brought by the pious Roman lady, Jacqueline of Settisoli. Then a prodigy was operated before them. The Saint's complexion had always been brown. Fatigue and suffering had made it still darker. After a few hours it turned to the most beautiful white. It seemed almost as if the white flesh were animated with a glow of life. The face, says Celano, was radiant as an angelic countenance. At the same time, the limbs, that had been stiffened by the contraction of the nerves, became supple, and could be stretched to their natural position. One word escaped from the lips of all who saw him; how beautiful he is! The brethren for a moment forgot their sorrow, and hailed this sudden beauty as the dawn of immortality, the beginning of the Resurrection.

The Stigmata were another source of consolation and joy. Hardly any one had properly seen those sacred wounds. Those who, like Brother Leo, were reckoned fortunate because they could testify to their existence, had only been able to give them a furtive glance. Now they were exposed to all beholders. What an impression they made! The nails in the feet and hands, formed of a dark substance, stood out against the whiteness of the body. Celano compares them picturesquely to lozenges of black marble inserted into a white marble pavement. The opening in the side which Francis had always hidden with such jealous care, by its rosy tint and folded edges resembled a rose which has just opened. The Saint seemed to everyone to be more than ever consecrated, and more marked with the seal of God



than they had imagined. "Such was Jesus Christ," they exclaimed. This image was so well engraven on their minds that twenty years later, Brother Leo, wishing to express to Brother Salimbene what they had all felt, said again; "It was exactly like Jesus Christ taken down from the Cross."

While the brethren were busied with these pious cares and thoughts, the news of the death of Francis began to spread in Assisi and the neighbourhood. It was received with the greatest joy. "He was a saint," the people said, "we shall have his relics, we have wished so much to have them! Praised and blessed be the Lord our God who entrusts to us so precious a treasure! We did not deserve it. Praise and glory to thee, O ineffable Trinity!" At the same time an immense crowd went down to the Portiuncula. Everyone wished to see with his eyes and to touch with his hands the marvels that God had worked in His servant. They did not wait to arrive there before beginning their praises. Everyone sang a hymn of joy at his own pleasure along the road.

At the Portiuncula the enthusiasm reached its height. The beauty of the body, and above all the Stigmata, made an impression on all who beheld them. There was one moment of silence, then tears, cries of admiration, invocations burst forth. Some contemplated the sacred wounds, others kissed them respectfully. Some tried to move the nails in the hands and feet. Amongst these, S. Bonaventura mentions a knight named Jerome, a man of letters, he says, and well educated, who was, so to say, the Thomas of the miracle. He examined it more curiously and boldly than all the others. In the presence of the brethren and of a number of people, he touched the feet, the hands, and the side of the Saint's body, he moved the nails in the wounds, and was so convinced of the truth of the fact that he became a zealous witness to it, and afterwards made a deposition on oath upon the Gospels.

The crowd increased. To prevent disorder it was neces-

sary to give some direction to its feelings. The brethren sang hymns and canticles, and the assistants joined with them in pious jubilation. By reason of these hymns and the light of a thousand tapers, the whole night, says Celano, was like an angelic vigil.

The fear of the body being carried away by armed force continued to haunt all minds. They felt they were in danger, exposed out there in the valley, away from the town, and they must not wait the usual length of time. The funeral was fixed for the next day, Sunday, at the first hour. At dawn the brethren clothed the glorious body of their father in a tunic, and placed it on a great bier shaped like a box. This bier was closed. Soon the consuls, magistrates, the army, the clergy, the people, the whole town and commune of Assisi arrived at the Portiuncula. The procession was arranged, and they started immediately. First came warriors with trumpets, then the body of the deceased, surrounded by all his children carrying lighted torches in their hands. Then followed the people in long lines bearing branches of olive and other trees. The clergy came last. All hearts seemed full of joy. The Psalms and hymns were not sung in mournful tones, but aloud and in triumphal accents.

Clara and her sisters had asked as a favour to be allowed to look once more on the features of their revered father, and in order to give them this consolation the procession took the road to S. Damian. There the body of the Saint was carried into the chapel and exposed uncovered in front of the grille. The little door or window through which Holy Communion was administered to the nuns was opened, and the Poor Ladies, assembled in the choir with Clara at their head, were close to their Holy Founder; they could even kiss the Stigmata on one of his hands. What must have been their emotion at that moment! At first they gazed in silence on that well-known and well-beloved countenance, then they burst forth into lamentations. They were like litanies of grief.

“O Father, O Father, what is to become of us? To whom dost thou

entrust us in this misery and desolation? Why hast thou not sent us before thee, instead of leaving us in this sorrow? What shall we do in this prison, now thou wilt no more come to visit us? O Father, all our consolation is gone with thee, we shall never find any support upon earth to compare with thee. O Father of the poor, who will enlighten us now in our temptations? Who will help us in our trials? O bitter separation, O intolerable absence, O horrible death bringing death to thousands of children! What life we had we had it only by him whom this death takes away from us."

These touching complaints were re-echoed by those who had been able to get into the chapel. Grief, which had hitherto been absent, seemed to recover its place at the sight of the tears of the holy sisters. But it was only for a short time; they must start again and mount the last slopes on the way to Assisi. The procession went straight to the Church of S. George. It was there that Francis had studied in his youth, there that he preached his first sermon, and there, with delicate attention, it was decided that he should first be buried. The Office of the dead was sung solemnly; then, when the ceremonies were ended, they laid the precious remains in a part of the lower church, called the *sanctuary*. A little stone monument was to receive them, but time was required to prepare it. Meanwhile the coffin was suspended on two iron bars, still to be seen in the wall of the church.

As soon as they returned to the Portiuncula, Brother Elias, as Vicar-General of the Order, officially announced the death of Francis to the brethren throughout the world. The circular letter, written under the influence of the first emotion, is perfectly suitable, and elevated in its tone. This is the translation from the copy addressed to the French Minors, long preserved in the archives of the Convent of the Recollects of Valenciennes.

*"To my well-beloved brother in Jesus Christ, Brother Gregory, Minister of the brethren in France, and to all his brethren and ours, Brother Elias, sinner, salutation.*

"Before I begin to speak I sigh, and not without reason. My grief bursts forth like an overflowing torrent, because the misfortune I dreaded

has fallen upon you and upon me. He who consoled us is no more ; he who carried us in his arms, like lambs, is gone into a far-off country. Beloved of God and of men, he has ascended to the abode of light, after having taught Jacob the law of knowledge and of life, and left to Israel the testament of peace. For him we must rejoice, but for ourselves we weep ; for without him we are enveloped in darkness and the shadow of death. The loss is common to us all ; the danger is special to me, on account of the uncertainty and of the cares of all kinds in which he has left me. I pray you, therefore, to share my grief, as I share yours. We are orphans, deprived of the light of our eyes. For our brother and father Francis was truly a light, not only to us who lived beside him, but also to those who lead a different life from ours ; a light emanating from the True Light, and illuminating the men sitting in darkness, to direct their steps into the way of peace. Lightened by the rays of the True Sun, and warmed by its fire, he everywhere preached the Kingdom of God, uniting fathers to their children, communicating to fools the wisdom of the just, and preparing a new generation for the Lord. His name has been carried to distant isles, and all the earth has admired his work.

“Be not sad beyond measure ; God, who is the Father of orphans, will not refuse you His holy consolations. If you must weep, weep for yourselves, not for him ; for we are sunk in death : he has passed from death to life. Rather be glad ; because this tender father, before he was taken from us, blessed all his children, like another Jacob, and forgave them all the sins they may have committed, were it only in thought, against himself.

“And now I have to announce to you a great joy and a new miracle. The like has never been heard of, unless it were of the Son of God, who is the Christ. Some time before his death, we saw our brother and father in the state of one crucified, bearing in his body five wounds, like those of Jesus Christ ; black nails, like iron nails, transpierced his hands and his feet ; his side, from whence at times blood came forth, looked as if it had been opened by a lance. He had no more any beauty, so greatly was his face changed and his whole body worn with suffering. His limbs, from the contraction of the nerves, had almost taken the rigidity of a corpse. But directly after his death he became most beautiful again, and of the purest white ; it was a pleasure to behold him. His limbs regained their flexibility ; they could be moved from side to side, like those of a child with a supple body.

“Then bless the God of heaven and earth, and praise Him before men for the mercy He has shown us. Preserve the memory of our father and brother Francis, for the honour of God, who has exalted him in the midst of men and glorified him before the angels. Pray for him, as he desired we should do ; and at the same time invoke him, that God may one day make us the participators of his glory.



“Our brother and father Francis died Sunday, the 4th October, at the first hour.<sup>1</sup> As soon as these present letters reach you, my beloved brethren, imitate the people of Israel, who wept for their illustrious chiefs, Moses and Aaron ; and let your tears flow, because you no longer have the consolation of possessing such a father. If it is a pious thing to rejoice with Francis, it is also a pious thing to weep for him. Let us rejoice with him, because he is not dead, but gone to the Celestial Market, with his wallet full of crown pieces. At the same time, let us weep for him, because he who went in and out, like Aaron, and who, for our consolation, drew from his treasure things old and new, has been taken from us. We are orphans. Let us then all turn to the Lord, my beloved brethren, and let us pray the Divine Potter that, after the destruction of this first precious vase, He will give us another vase worthy to fill the same office in our numerous family ; a chief who, like a true Maccabee, will lead us to battle. Since it is a salutary thing to pray for the dead, pray for the repose of his soul. Every priest shall say three masses, every clerk the Psalter, the lay brothers five *Pater Nosters*. The clerks shall sing the vigils of the dead solemnly. Brother Elias, sinner.”

A few weeks after the funeral, the coffin was deposited in the monument that Brother Elias had had made. It was of the simplest kind, made of smooth stones, without any inscription. The deposition seems to have taken place without much ceremony. But it was marked by a miracle. A young girl had been brought whose neck was so twisted that her head rested on one shoulder, and by its weight had made an indentation in the flesh. This child was placed under the bier. No sooner had her head touched the sacred relic than it sprung up as though moved by a spring, and remained in a straight position upon the neck. The poor little thing was so astonished at the change that she burst into tears and ran away as fast as she could. This was the first miracle worked by S. Francis after his death. It was soon followed by many others. They had only given a provisional burial to the Saint. God did not leave this sepulchre without virtue nor without glory.

<sup>1</sup> According to the manner of reckoning at that time, Sunday began at six o'clock on Saturday evening.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HIS CANONISATION, 1226-1230.

THE "Three Companions" say that Francis resembled Samson ; he caused more souls to die to sin after his death than he had done during his life. He was wept for universally, says Celano, because everyone was persuaded that now he was gone the world would be plunged in darkness. In reality, the star that had disappeared from earth rose in the firmament, and it was given to a great number of men to behold it, to receive its light, and to enjoy its benefits. People talked of his death as of a happy event, and the historian, according to his custom, explains the reason of this unexpected joy. On one hand, he says, Francis had increased in power ; God, Who had made him the image of His crucified Son, could not refuse his prayers. On the other hand, he was no longer confined to one spot in space, as in the days of his mortal life ; he had the powers of motion of the angelic spirits, and could come at the instigation of his compassion to all those who invoked him ; he often brought them benefits in person from the Sovereign King.

The power with which Francis was endowed was felt in all parts of the world, but there were certain privileged places where that power seemed to be more readily exercised ; they were those which he had most loved when on earth. One of the characters of the Saint had been fidelity in affection, and this fidelity continued in his new life.

As was natural, Assisi was the most favoured place. Virtue issued from the tomb of Francis, and operating on his fellow-citizens, worked miracles. On the day of his canonisation, the account of forty miracles that had taken place in the space of twenty months was read publicly. Thirteen of these

miracles occurred in the little church of S. George, where his body was laid. We cannot relate them all. The following is one that we select in preference, because it was a child who was cured, and we have not seen that Francis often had much relation with children. This little one was poor, and so paralysed in his lower limbs that he could neither walk nor sit up. They brought him to the door of the church, lying in a little carriage, probably to excite the compassion of the pilgrims. There he passed several days living on what was given him. At last, perhaps at his own request, they carried him in to the tomb of the Saint. This is how he himself told the story of his cure. As soon as he was placed near the sepulchre, a man, who seemed to be in the flower of his age, clothed in the Minor's habit, and carrying some fine pears in his hand, called him by his name. "Get up," he said, at the same time giving him a pear. The child answered: "I cannot get up because I am a cripple," but he took the pear and ate it. When he had eaten it, he put out his hand for another. The gracious unknown gave him a second, and again invited him to get up. The child did not do so, not feeling strong enough, but he ate the second pear. These pears seemed to him most delicious; he asked for a third. The unknown gave it him, and as he gave it, he took him by the hand and led him on his feet out of the church, after which he disappeared. The child's legs had carried him perfectly. "I am cured," he cried, as he ate the third pear. The people assembled around him, and there was universal acclamation. Such a paternal intervention was quite worthy of the heart of Francis. The other twenty-seven miracles took place in Umbria and the neighbouring provinces. In the record preserved to us we find the names of those towns which Francis had most frequently visited: Perugia, Spoleto, Foligno, Todi, San Severo, Gubbio. We give two, one of which was performed at Città della Pieve, the other at Narni. There was at Città della Pieve a poor young man deaf and dumb from his birth. His dumbness was not caused

entirely by his deafness. His tongue was so small and short it looked as if it had been cut. One evening this young man entered the house of a rich inhabitant of the town, named Mark, and leaning his cheek against his hand, indicated by that sign that he wished to sleep in the house. Mark granted him the hospitality he desired, and after consulting with his wife he kept him for some days, because he waited very well at table. The poor mute was very quick, and guessed what his masters wanted from the least sign. They became attached to him, partly on account of his amiability, partly because of his poverty. Some time after his arrival, when they were at supper, Mark said to his wife : "It would be a great miracle if the blessed Francis would give him his speech and hearing," and he added—"If he would perform this miracle, out of gratitude and love to him, I would keep this poor boy and provide for all his wants." Hardly had he spoken when the mute cried out : "Long live S. Francis," at the same time he raised his eyes to heaven. "There is S. Francis," he said ; "he has come to give me my speech." In fact, his tongue was suddenly lengthened, and he articulated as if he had always spoken. His heart overflowed with joy and gratitude. "How shall I make known this prodigy to the world?" he said. "Praise God," replied Mark, "God will save many souls through thee." Then the young man went out and related what had happened. The neighbours came ; everyone knew the mute and was filled with wonder.

At Narni the cure was of a character still more touching. It was granted to a beggar named Bartholomew, who had become crippled from having gone to sleep under a walnut tree. For six years he had been suffering from paralysis. One of his legs was shrivelled and twisted, so that it might be cut or burnt without his feeling it. He could not move without a painful effort. In his misery he thought of S. Francis of whom everyone was talking, and he made a vow to him. The father of the poor was not deaf to this appeal from a poor man ; in the night he appeared to him



and ordered him to go and bathe in a certain water that he designated. "I pity thee," he said, "and I will deliver thee from thy infirmity." The poor man hesitated. He thought it strange that instead of curing him at once, Francis should order him to make a journey that would be so difficult for him. He consulted the bishop of the place, who advised him to do as he had been told, and gave him his benediction. Bartholomew took a stick, and as best he could dragged himself towards the place indicated. Soon he began to groan, he thought he should never reach it. "Courage," cried an invisible voice; "do not lose the peace of God. I am he to whom thou hast vowed." Comforted by these words, the poor man went on again. He had another misfortune; he lost his way and found that he was going further and further from his goal. Night was drawing on. "Thou hast missed the path," said the same voice again, "the right road is on the other side." Bartholomew knew that a friend was watching over him, and he complained no more at this additional fatigue, but followed the track pointed out to him. As soon as he reached the bath he went into the water. Immediately he felt a hand placed on his knee and another on his foot. The invisible operator gently drew the leg so as to straighten it, and it soon recovered its original state. The man felt he was cured; he leapt out of the water, and published the miracle abroad to the glory of God and of S. Francis.

Celano tells us that next to Umbria and Assisi, France was the country where he oftenest exercised his beneficent power. "Who can tell the number of miracles that Francis worked in France?" he says. Notwithstanding his desire to do so, the Saint had not been able to evangelise that nation. He took his revenge for the obstacles that had prevented him in his mortal life by heaping favours upon the people after he had left this world. There is another cause that may also have inclined him towards them. Directly after his death, a cushion that he had used in his last illness was sent to Paris. This precious relic was received with almost

as much solemnity as, twelve years later, the sacred crown of thorns was received. The king, the queen, and the nobles of the kingdom went out to meet it. The University, "the men of letters, and the sages of the world, of whom," says the historian, "there are always more in Paris than in any other place on earth," took the occasion to manifest their admiration for the Saint and his work. Francis, who was ever courteous, rewarded this homage by multiplying the number of miracles. We cannot but regret that the account of them has not come down to us.

Meanwhile two events, both connected with this history, took place in the Church. The first was the elevation of Cardinal Ugolino to the Pontifical throne. Honorius only survived the holy patriarch a few months; he died March 18, 1227. We cannot take leave of this gentle Pontiff without recalling to mind that Francis was indebted to him for three eminent services: Honorius granted him the indulgence of the Portiuncula; he gave him Cardinal Ugolino as protector of his Order; and he solemnly approved of his Rule. These things are more than enough to make the children of S. Francis faithful to his memory. The Cardinals met the day after his death, and unanimously elected Cardinal Ugolino, who took the name of Gregory IX. He was more than eighty-five years of age, but God gave him fourteen more years of life, and his vigorous old age was equal to every task. The Church found in him an active and intrepid pilot during one of the most terrible storms it has ever passed through. The Cardinal had always been a father and a friend to Francis, and it was easy to foresee that as Pope he would continue to support the work, and with God's permission proclaim him to have been a saint amongst the most saintly.

The other event was of a more private nature. After the holy Founder's death, Brother Elias had continued to govern the brethren *ad interim*. This provisional situation came to an end at the Chapter General of 1227. The members of the Chapter did not elect Elias to the

functions of minister general. Their suffrages fell upon the provincial of Spain, John Parenti, whose vocation we have related in its place. Formerly a magistrate, he preserved the habits of gravity and equity appropriate to that office ; he seemed made to exercise authority ; he was, besides, a holy, spiritual man, quite suited to the part of a father, says Bernardo da Bessa. Like Francis, he was a great advocate for religious poverty, and there was no fear that he would withdraw the Order from the primitive ways. No doubt his election was submitted to the approval of the Sovereign Pontiff. Gregory IX. willingly ratified it, but he thought some compensation was due to Elias. He gave him the commission to prepare the erection of a beautiful church, which should be the final resting-place of the holy Founder.

Gregory IX. must then have had it in his mind that he should one day propose Francis to the veneration of the faithful. The miracles worked by the servant of God were heard of on all sides. The venerable Pontiff experienced profound satisfaction as the news of them was brought to him. He had never doubted of the holiness of the beloved son whom he had borne in his heart, but it was a consolation to him to see that holiness so quickly established by God Himself. Besides, these miracles were not only a justification of his own feelings, they justified the Church also, and renewed her youth. The Waldensians and the Emperor Frederic II. pretended that the Church was falling into decay and was no more assisted by God. Here was a proof that there was no decay, the world could see for itself that the miracles of the ages of power were renewed. Still, it remained to place these miracles above criticism by submitting them to competent scrutiny. If they came out victorious from this scrutiny, as was likely, the Pontiff looked forward to doing two things that would both give him joy : he would confound the enemies of the Church, and he would canonise his holy friend. The realisation of these thoughts, that he looked upon as yet distant, was hastened by the course of events. A revolution broke out in Rome in the spring of

1228. The Romans, *seditiosum hominum genus*, rose against the Head of the Church. Gregory IX., faithful to the constant policy of his predecessors, resolved to let the sedition wear itself out. He left Rome, accompanied by all the Sacred College. After a first halt at Rieti, a little town that had always been attached to the Holy See, he stopped for some days at Spoleto, where he was respectfully received, and then took the road to Assisi.

Before going up to the town Gregory stopped at S. Damian to visit Clara and her sisters. A Pope, exclaims Celano, visiting poor nuns! It was an unheard-of thing, an excess of condescension. But, continues the historian, humility has kindly inspirations. We may add that perhaps the Pontiff remembered that he had been the superior of that holy monastery. He had not seen the nuns since the death of Francis, and he may have wished to give them the comfort of his presence, and to converse with Clara about him whose mind and virtue she had been so intimately acquainted with. At Assisi preparations were made for receiving the Pontiff with all the honour due to his dignity. As soon as his arrival at S. Damian was known, a great procession was formed; the inhabitants of the town put themselves at the head, the Minors and the clergy followed, each carrying a lighted taper in their hands. These long lines of light made the day still brighter, although the sun was shining in all its splendour. They sang the most beautiful hymns of the Church. The Pontiff requested to be first conducted to the tomb of Francis; there he prostrated himself, and prayed for a long time. It was observed that he often struck his breast and shed abundant tears.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of Gregory IX. with his whole court left no doubt as to his intentions. Everyone in Assisi said that Francis would be canonised, and, in fact, it was soon known that the order had been given to find out all those who, since his death, had been the subject of some miracle. These people soon began to come in from various places.

<sup>1</sup> *I. Cel.* p. 104.



Their deposition was registered, and the inquiry began. The Pope required that it should be conducted with the utmost strictness. S. Bonaventura says that the Cardinals to whom he gave the commission were some of those who were least in favour of the cause.

While this work was going on, the Roman Court was suddenly conducted to Perugia, from some unknown cause, probably some menacing enterprise of the emperor. This change of place made no difference to the great business which was occupying all minds. The Cardinals continued their examination as they would have done at Assisi. The abundance of testimony was so great that their convictions were soon formed. At their request the Pope convoked a final solemn consistory in his room. The reports of the commissioners were read and approved. "All these miracles are incontestable," said the Cardinals, as they gave their opinion, "but we had no need of this guarantee. We had seen with our eyes and touched with our hands the holiness of this most holy man. In proclaiming his holiness we are certain we are not deceived." Struck by their unanimity, and convinced by what he knew himself, the Pontiff declared that there was cause to canonise the servant of God, and he announced that he would proceed with this canonisation on Sunday, July 16, in the Church of S. George.

The general impatience found this Sunday very long in coming, but it came at last, and the sun rose in all its brilliance to honour the festival of him who had often called it his brother. The church of S. George was adorned like a mother for her son's triumph. It shone with lights; green wreaths had been tastefully arranged; there were splendid draperies and nosegays of flowers decorating the interior. A raised throne richly ornamented awaited the Lord's anointed, in the sanctuary close to the altar.

When the building was opened at the appointed hour, an immense crowd, intoxicated with joy, filled the places assigned to it. First there were the inhabitants of Assisi, the poor, the rich, those who had been cured, the friends,

and we should like to think, though the historians do not name them, the relatives, perhaps the father and mother, of the Saint. Then there were all the lords, barons, and princes ; they came in such numbers, it seemed like a royal assembly. The nuns came in their long veils, with Clara and her daughters at their head, and religious of every Order were there behind the happy sons of Francis. Finally, near the sanctuary, were the clerks and priests in great numbers.

When order and silence were established, the Sovereign Pontiff made his entry. His train was composed of the abbots of the neighbouring monasteries, a great number of bishops, many of whom had come from distant dioceses, and Cardinals. The abbots wore the severe costume of their Order. The bishops and Cardinals, with their mitres and snow-white copes, resembled a procession of angelic spirits. At last came Gregory IX., wearing the tiara, clothed in ceremonial vestments sparkling with gold and precious stones. He attracted all eyes, with his white hair, his great height, and his slightly bent figure, and his countenance radiant with joy. He truly looked like the bridegroom of the Church.

He opened the sitting by addressing a discourse to the assembly. He took for his text those words of Ecclesiasticus : " He shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full. And as the sun when it shineth, so did he shine in the temple of God." His first words were to exalt the goodness of God Who gives to His Church saints from whom she can derive strength. He spoke with a firm voice, till he began to tell of the virtues and character of Francis, then his voice broke, a flood of recollections overwhelmed him, he wept and could not continue his speech. Celano, who was present, says that the tears were seen flowing down upon his rich vestments. After him Octaviano Conti, Cardinal-deacon, read aloud the exact account of the miracles that had been examined. We have said that they were forty in

number. The compassion, the courtesy, the whole soul of Francis were shown forth in all these reports. This was strongly expressed by Cardinal Raniero Capoccio, who had been one of the Saint's friends, and who was the next to speak. He added that all these miracles were a divine manifestation of the holiness of Francis, and he concluded by saying, that it only remained to canonise upon earth him whom God had already canonised in heaven.

The expectation of the assistants was strung to such a pitch that it became almost painful. The Sovereign Pontiff rose, stretched out his arms, and in a loud voice pronounced these words: "To the glory of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of the glorious Virgin Mary, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and to the honour of the Roman Church, wishing to venerate on earth him whom God has glorified in heaven, with the counsel of our brethren and the other prelates, We declare that there is reason to inscribe the blessed Father Francis in the catalogue of the Blessed." Then the Pope intoned the *Te Deum*, the Cardinals and the Friars Minor took up the chant, the people within and without the church burst forth into acclamations, the martial trumpets sounded a note of triumph, all the bells in the city pealed forth the announcement of the great event which was just accomplished. Meanwhile Gregory IX. descended the steps of the choir and went into the lower church to do homage to the new Saint. He respectfully kissed the stone which covered his remains, deposited a rich offering upon it, and knelt for some time in prayer. Then he offered the Holy Sacrifice. All the Friars Minor, carrying torches and olive branches, stood around the altar in a circle.

There was a morrow to this grand festival. Brother Elias had no sooner been charged with the office of erecting a permanent tomb to the holy Founder, than he set to work with the incomparable activity he always carried into his affairs. With wonderful foresight he chose a most favourable situation, in spite of its irregular form. This was a hill situated on the western side of the town. It

belonged partly to Simon Puzzarelli, one of the rich inhabitants of Assisi. Elias at once obtained possession of it from this generous man, who gave it gratuitously for the accomplishment of the Pontiff's plan. The next matter was far more difficult, namely, the choice of an architect ; and in this also Brother Elias was most fortunate. Messire Jacopo, or Lapo, whom, at his request, the Emperor Frederic II. sent from Lombardy, constructed a building of a most remarkable kind. The plans were all prepared, the first works of levelling and arranging were begun, and it was wished to take advantage of the presence of the Pontiff for laying the foundation stone. Gregory IX. willingly agreed, and the Monday was appointed for this new ceremony. The hill had an unfortunate name : it was called the *Hill of Hell*, because it was said that in former days malefactors had been executed there ; the Pope decided that, on account of the new church, for the future it should be called the *Hill of Paradise*.

On the Tuesday the Pope returned to Perugia with all his court. His heart was not yet satisfied. The very next day he addressed a bull to the bishops of the whole world, recommending the new Saint to their devotion. We cite the principal passages of this bull.

“Behold, at the eleventh hour, God has raised up in His Church a man after His own heart, the blessed Francis. In the eyes of those who are full of themselves he may have seemed a very small lamp. Nevertheless he was the light reserved for our epoch. God sent him into His vineyard, that he might root up the thorns ; that he might conquer the Philistines, His adversaries, and reconcile souls to the truth. Truly his life was so holy, so courageous, and so beautiful, that it sufficed to give him a place in the Church triumphant. Nevertheless the Church militant, who can only judge from what is visible, would not have proposed him to the veneration of the faithful on the strength of his interior virtues alone, knowing that an angel of Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light. But the powerful and merciful God, who had, by His grace, made of him a good and worthy servant, would not permit such holiness to remain hidden under a bushel ; He has placed it as on a candlestick, for the consolation of those who inhabit the house of light.



By numerous miracles He has shown that his works were agreeable to Him, and that his memory was to be venerated on earth.

“For ourselves, all that was most admirable in his life was known to us long before, thanks to the friendship which united us with him when we were in a lower rank. Recently informed, by competent witnesses, that miracles due to his power were being worked on all sides, having confidence that we and the flock committed to us will be assisted by his suffrages, and that we shall have him for a protector in heaven who was our friend on earth, by the advice of, and with the consent of our brethren, we have inscribed him in the catalogue of the Blessed, and we have appointed the 4th October as his festival.

“By these letters apostolical we command and enjoin you all, that on the day of the feast you praise God with your whole hearts, in memory of him, and that you humbly implore his patronage.”

What Gregory IX. did in this case was not unexampled. Before this time popes had been known to recommend to the Universal Church those saints whom they had just canonised, and they have done the same thing in later days; but what was quite an innovation, and an act that has never been repeated, was, that after once addressing the Church on this subject, the Pontiff should repeat almost immediately the same theme. This is what Gregory IX. did for S. Francis. On the 29th February he published another bull, recommending his cultus to the whole Church. The letter is addressed to the archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, archpriests, archdeacons, deacons, and other prelates of the Church. It only varies from the former one in being still more emphatic.

“We enjoin you all,” he says, “to guide the devotion of the faithful to venerate this Saint; we desire you to celebrate, and to have celebrated solemnly, his feast, on the 4th October each year, that through his supplication, God may grant us His grace in this world and His glory in the next.”

We see that the Pope looked upon Francis more and more as the protector of the Church at this period, and desired that all the world should do the same. He was the first to pray to him, and he prayed frequently. He asked encouragement and consolation from him, as he had done

in his lifetime. Above all, he asked for his assistance in the difficult government of the Church. In return he gave him affectionate homage. When the feast celebrated in his honour approached, he wished to have an entirely new Proper Office composed; and, in spite of his occupations and his advanced age, he undertook to be the principal compiler of it. The sequence in the mass, *Caput draconis ultimum*, and the hymn at first vespers, *Prolis de cælo prodiit*, are his. It would be flattery to call them masterpieces, but the heart and sentiment of the Pontiff are felt in them. He has expressed happily enough what was his strong conviction, that Francis had been the saviour of the Church in troublous times. Many Cardinals assisted him in this work. Ramiro Capoccio composed the hymn for Lauds, *Plaude, turba paupercola*; Thomas of Capua the one for matins, *In cælesti collegio*, and the one for second vespers, *Decus morum, dux minorum*. The whole Roman court was full of thoughts of Francis.

Meanwhile the energy of Brother Elias had performed a real prodigy at Assisi. The architect's plan required that, besides the tomb itself, which was to be hewn out of the rock, there should be two Gothic churches built one above the other; the under one low roofed and in the shape of a vessel, to represent the laborious life of the Saint; the other of light, aerial proportions, symbolising his transfigured life. The works were pushed on so vigorously that in the month of April 1230, less than two years after the laying of the foundation stone, the lower church was almost finished. The Sovereign Pontiff was informed of it, and he, who had been impatiently expecting the news, answered at once by the Bull: *Is qui Ecclesiam* (22 April). In it he declared that the new church should be his church. It should depend directly upon the Holy See and should be invested with the highest privileges. He ordered that it should be immediately considered as the Mother Church and the Mistress of the Order of which the glorious S. Francis had been the founder and father. At the same time he

authorised the brethren to transfer the sacred relics from the Church of S. George, where they then were, to the new tomb that had been prepared for them.

From some unknown cause, probably a political event, the Pope was unable to assist at this translation. He endeavoured to console himself by enriching the new sanctuary with the most valuable gifts. On the 16th May he sent to Assisi a gold cross ornamented with precious stones and containing a piece of the true Cross, sacred vases of gold and silver, sacerdotal ornaments of great beauty, and a considerable sum of money for the completion of the edifice. A letter, in which the paternal old man expressed all that was in his heart, accompanied these presents.

“In the midst of the evils which overwhelm us,” he said to the brethren, “we find a subject of joy and thanksgiving in the glory that God sheds upon the blessed Francis, our father and yours, and ours even more than yours. Besides the striking miracles of which he has been the instrument, we have authentic proofs that not long since a dead man has been restored to life by his intercession. And this it is which encourages us more and more to publish the praises of this great Saint, feeling confident, that having loved us so tenderly when he was in the world, he loves us still more now that he is more closely united to Jesus Christ, who is love itself; hoping also that you whom he has begotten to Jesus Christ, and whom he has left heirs of the riches of his extreme poverty, you whom we bear in the bowels of our love with the ardent desire of procuring the good of your Order, will employ your prayers to obtain from God that our tribulations may contribute to our salvation.”

In another confidential letter the Pope designated those of the brethren who were to represent him as commissioners at the ceremony, and expressed the desire that it should be performed with all possible pomp.

This was also the intention of the Minister, John Parenti, and for this purpose he convoked the triennial Chapter at Assisi. He desired, as was natural, that a large circle of children should surround the remains of their father, but he had counted without the cautious and prudent policy of Brother Elias. The latter, as soon as the translation was fixed, had conferred with the magistrates of the city. He

easily persuaded them that it was important to prevent the arrival of so great a number of witnesses. "If the place of deposition is known," he said, "sooner or later the sacred body will be snatched from us by the neighbouring towns; no one must know where we inter it." The magistrates promised to lend themselves to all his suggestions. The translation was to take place on the Vigil of Pentecost. They began by anticipating it by three days, so that most of the brethren should arrive after the event. This was the least strange part of the affair. The pious ceremony was about to take place, the sacred chants were heard approaching: the holy relics, covered by a rich tapestry sent by Queen Blanche, the mother of S. Louis, and borne on the shoulders of the principal brethren, was slowly advancing towards the new church. Suddenly the town archers appeared from the neighbouring streets and charged the procession with their lances. The desired effect was produced, an indescribable tumult arose, in the midst of which certain confederates seized on the body, rushed into the church, shut the doors, and there, without the clergy, or any witnesses, placed the sacred remains in the stone sarcophagus which had been secretly prepared beforehand. The measures had been so well taken and the secret was so well kept, that for nearly six centuries the world was ignorant of the exact place of sepulture. Thus the Saint had no tomb properly so called; his tomb was the double church that rose above his bones.<sup>1</sup>

It would be difficult to give an idea of the complaints that arose in consequence of this enterprise of Brother Elias. Was it wise, as some tried to say? was it not rather pro-

<sup>1</sup> The place where the body lay was unknown until our own century. In 1818 Pius VII. gave permission to Brother de Bonis, Minister-General of the Conventual Minors, to search beneath the high altar. The work was done in secret and lasted fifty-two nights. After having broken through rocks and stone, they came upon an iron grating which contained a human skeleton lying in a stone coffin. These were the remains of S. Francis, as they were identified and as the Pope solemnly affirmed after a judicial examination. The cavern has since been enlarged and made into a third sanctuary.



fanation and sacrilege? No one knew exactly. But the best feelings were hurt. The whole population, priests and religious, as well as laymen, were angry and indignant. There was a chorus of recriminations. One of the brethren, named James, instead of joining in this chorus, obeyed a happy inspiration. He had good reason to be disappointed, for, suffering from a dangerous hernia, he had come to take part in the joy of the translation, with the idea of begging S. Francis to cure him, as soon as he should be placed in the new tomb. He was of a pacific nature, and since this tomb was closed before him, he said calmly that there was nothing for him to do but to go back to the old one. The little church of S. George was deserted after the body had been removed. He went into the solitude and prostrated himself on the spot where the Saint's bier had stood so long, and devoutly pressed his lips to the stone. The Blessed Father recognised one of his true children: he cured him, and Brother James never suffered again from his complaint.

Elias had started on a dangerous path. He felt obliged to keep up the part he had begun to play, lest he should reveal more of his real intentions than he had yet done. The Chapter opened as had been arranged, during the Octave of Pentecost. Elias, feeling that he was blamed by all the brethren, resolved to attempt another great stroke of authority. As soon as the meeting began, his partisans, by his own orders, went in a body to fetch him from his cell, and brought him with a great deal of noise into the Chapter Room. They tried to seat him on the Minister-General's seat. S. Antony, who, as provincial Minister, took part in the assembly, vainly endeavoured to show them the impropriety of their conduct. The followers of Elias drowned his voice with their cries. The tumult was at its height. John Parenti, at the end of his resources, rent his clothes in the excess of his grief. This act did what his authority had failed to do. The greater part of the brethren grouped themselves around him, and the rebels saw that they were beaten. They stopped. Many declared in the humblest terms that they

had done a wrong thing. Brother Elias was the first to confess his fault and to ask to do penance. He was sent to a convent at a distance from Assisi. There he showed every sign of true sorrow; he let his hair and his beard grow, and continued to accuse himself so severely that he convinced the Order, perhaps too late, that his repentance was sincere.<sup>1</sup>

It may seem surprising, but the fact is that his departure caused very little or no delay in the erection of the upper church. The impulse had been given, resources continued to be abundantly supplied, and the works were carried on by the architect, with whom was associated his brother, Filippo di Campello. In less than six years the new building was completed. Architecture had paid a marvellous tribute to Francis; without exaggeration it may be said that this was one of her best works. The two churches superimposed upon each other give the beholder an impression that can never be forgotten. Had they been left in the whiteness of stone and marble, they would still in themselves be well nigh perfect, and history would have proclaimed that in that unique conception there was displayed as much artistic genius as affection towards the Saint. But, as has been said, "the men of the Middle Ages did not think a monument finished when merely the stones were erected; they required the stones to speak, and to speak in the language of painting, which is understood by the ignorant and the little ones; that heaven should there be made visible, that the angels and saints should dwell there in their likenesses to console and preach to the people." (*Chavin de Malan*, "History of S. Francis of Assisi.")

So the beautifying of the edifice was begun. The vaults of the two basilicas were covered with an azure field

<sup>1</sup> In this behaviour there was something far different from vulgar ambition. The struggle was to see which government was to rule in the Order; that of John Parenti, who continued the way of S. Francis, or that of Brother Elias, such as we have described it in Chapter XXII.

sprinkled with gold stars. On the walls were portrayed the mysteries of the two Testaments. The life of S. Francis was the sequel, and corresponded to the life of our Lord. The portraits of the sons who had become saints in their turn, accompanied the portrait of the father. Neither piety nor art could do enough. During three centuries the best painters exercised their genius and labour on that church. Guido da Siena began in 1250, less than thirty years after S. Francis' death. In 1506, Andrea d' Assisi, a fellow-student and friend of Raphael, painted the admirable prophets which adorn the vault of the chapel of S. Louis. The poem was then almost concluded. There was hardly an inch of surface left that had not been brought into life by some inspired hand. In that constellation of great masters there is one who surpasses the rest both by the importance and the character of his work ; this is Giotto. The friend of Dante, he did for painting what Dante did for poetry : he gave life to the stiff ancient style, carried the art of composition and grouping to a high point, and was able to understand and give expression to all sentiments. A member of the Third Order from his youth, and consequently a son of S. Francis, he consecrated his brush to our Lord and to him whom he called his father ; he is pre-eminently the Franciscan painter.

His works, notwithstanding the injuries of time, are still the glory of the noble monument. In the upper church especially he has filled the office of the historian. He has traced the principal events in the Saint's life in twenty-eight frescoes. All those pages certainly are not of equal value, but not one of them is common-place, they all reveal some characteristic of the Saint's soul. After examining them for a time we seem to have a living picture of S. Francis in our mind. Besides, many of them are real masterpieces. The death of the Saint is as pathetic as any representation of a death that has ever been painted ; and in the fresco of the obsequies the artist was inspired by genius. He has imagined Clara, who has come out of the Chapel of S.

Damian, leaning with her two hands resting on the open bier, while she contemplates the face of the Saint, as though she would in this last look revive the sweet attraction that had enlightened her life. The attitude is not historic, but the artist, like the poet, has a right to keep to the spirit as much as to the reality. No one could better have indicated the bond stronger than death which united those holy souls.

Some years later, Giotto painted the frescoes in the lower church. They are justly more famous than those in the upper building. The beautiful vault above the altar, the most sacred place in the church, is decorated by his hand. Here, inspired by Dante, as is supposed, he has represented those virtues that are the foundation and soul of the religious life. He has done so in three allegories. Chastity is figured by a veiled woman, praying with her hands joined, in a fortress. She is hardly visible. Purity and Strength are her companions. Angels are plunging into a bath those who, at the invitation of Francis, are giving themselves to her. In the distance, Penance, with a scourge in her hand, chases away impure Love who wears a chaplet of hearts. Opposite, Obedience, with wings half folded and a finger on her mouth, places a yoke upon Francis which he willingly accepts. She is assisted by Prudence and Humility, two beautiful ideal figures. Groups of angels contemplate the scene. A centaur, who has evidently lost his way, is there, representing, in contrast, undisciplined and brutal strength. In the third place appears "Poverty, in the guise of a woman, very beautiful, but with emaciated face and torn garments; a dog barks at her, and two children throw stones and place brambles on her path. She calmly and joyfully holds out her hand to Francis. Christ Himself unites the two spouses; in the midst of clouds is seen the Almighty, accompanied by angels, as though heaven and earth were both assisting at the marriage of these two beggars." <sup>1</sup> Finally, in the fourth compartment, on the side of the apse, where the Byzantines and Mosaicists represented

<sup>1</sup> Ozanam; Franciscan Poets.



Christ triumphant, Giotto has painted Francis in glory, *Franciscus gloriosus*, as the artist himself has written it. The Saint, beaming with youth and beauty, is seated on a golden throne, clothed in a rich deacon's tunic, and surrounded by a multitude of angels almost as gentle and joyous as the angels of Fra Angelico. All these celestial spirits gaze on their seraphic brother, they carry flowers in their hands and play on musical instruments.

We have tried to describe these marvels: they must be seen at Assisi on a bright spring morning, or during some ceremony when the basilica is brilliant with hundreds of lights. The walls become animated and living; heaven seems to approach the earth. Filled with admiration, we exclaim: Here is a sepulchre honoured beyond all others, this is indeed one of the finest churches in the world.

## CONCLUSION.

IT is time to conclude. We will do so by summing up the life we have been relating, but it will not be in our own words. It was done in the fourteenth century by a poet genius. All glory is sheltered beneath the mantle of Francis. Dante, like Giotto his friend, was a Tertiary.<sup>1</sup> Like him, he saw in Francis a man raised up by heaven, and one of the great figures of history. He has consecrated to him the eleventh canto of his "Paradise." We cannot study these beautiful verses too much. They contain everything; the providential vocation of the Saint, his reformation in the name of poverty, the irresistible attraction that he exercised, the grand lines of his life, his austere and beautiful death. We here give the translation of them; they prove that Francis was even then appreciated as we appreciate him.

The Providence, which governeth the world with counsel, wherein all created vision is vanquished ere it reach unto the bottom,

(So that towards her own Beloved might go the Bride of Him who, uttering a loud cry, espoused her with His consecrated blood,

Self-confident and unto Him more faithful,) two Princes did ordain in her behoof, which on this side and that might be her guide.

The one was all seraphical in ardour; the other by his wisdom upon earth, a splendour was of light cherubical.

One will I speak of, for of both is spoken in praising one, whichever may be taken, because unto one end their labours were.

Between Tupino and the stream that falls down from the hill elect of blessed Ubald, a fertile slope of lofty mountain hangs,

From which Perugia feels the cold and heat through Porta-Sole, and behind it weep Gualdo and Nocera their grievous yoke.

From out that slope, there where it breaketh most its steepness, rose upon the world a sun, as this one does sometimes from out the Ganges;

Therefore let him who speaketh of that place, say not Ascesi, for he would say little, but Orient, if he properly would speak.

<sup>1</sup> In one of the frescoes we have spoken of, Giotto has represented three personages who offer themselves to S. Francis that he may lead them to chastity; the first is John of Murano, then General of the Minors, he represents the First Order; the second is a veiled woman, representing the Second Order; the third is Dante Alighieri, he represents the Third Order.—Cf. "Cristofani," lib. iii. p. 202.

He was not yet far distant from his rising before he had begun to make  
 the earth some comfort from his mighty virtue-feel.  
 For he in youth his father's wrath incurred for certain Dame, to whom,  
 as unto death, the gate of pleasure no one doth unlock ;  
 And was before his spiritual court *Et coram patre* unto her united ; then  
 day by day more fervently he loved her.  
 She, reft of her first husband, scorned, obscure, one thousand and one  
 hundred years and more, waited without a suitor till he came.  
 Naught it availed to hear, that with Amyclas found her unmoved at sound-  
 ing of his voice he who struck terror into all the world ;  
 Naught it availed being constant and undaunted, so that, when Mary  
 still remained below, she mounted up with Christ upon the cross !  
 But that too darkly I may not proceed, Francis and Poverty for these two  
 lovers take thou henceforward in my speech diffuse.  
 Their concord and their joyous semblances, the love, the wonder and the  
 sweet regard, they made to be the cause of holy thoughts ;  
 So much so that the venerable Bernard first bared his feet, and after so  
 great peace ran, and in running thought himself too slow.  
 O wealth unknown ! O veritable good ! Giles bares his feet, and bares  
 his feet Sylvester behind the bridegroom, so doth please the bride !  
 Then goes his way that father and that master, he and his Lady and that  
 family which now was girding on the humble cord ;  
 Nor cowardice of heart weighed down his brow at being son of Peter  
 Bernardone, nor for appearing marvellously scorned ;  
 But regally his hard determination to Innocent he opened, and from him  
 received the primal seal upon his Order.  
 After the people mendicant increased behind this man, whose admirable  
 life better in glory of the heavens were sung,  
 Incoronated with a second crown was through Honorius by the Eternal  
 Spirit the holy purpose of this Archimandrite.  
 And when he had, through thirst of martyrdom, in the proud presence of  
 the Sultan preached Christ and the others who came after him,  
 And finding for conversion too unripe the folk, and not to tarry there in  
 vain, returned to fruit of the Italic grass.  
 On the rude rock 'twixt Tiber and the Arno, from Christ did he receive  
 the final seal, which during two whole years his members bore.  
 When He who chose him unto so much good, was pleased to draw him  
 up to the reward that he had merited by being lowly,  
 Unto his friars, as to the rightful heirs, his most dear Lady did he recom-  
 mend, and bade that they should love her faithfully,  
 And from her bosom the illustrious soul wished to depart, returning to its  
 realm, and for its body wished no other bier.  
 ("The Divine Comedy." Paradise, chap. xi. Longfellow's Trans.)





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